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**The Real Deal: Professional  
Klezmer Musicians On A London  
World Music Scene**

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**PhD Thesis**

**City University London  
Department of Music**

**March 2013**

**Dedicated to the memory of  
Jim Marcovitch (1974-2008)**

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To all of the musicians with whom I play regularly, and those who I see less of - this research would have been impossible without you all. The casual discussions on the way back from gigs, some which I recorded, formed the basis of this whole work. Inevitably, some of you will read this and recognise yourselves and, perhaps, others. I hope that I have represented us all accurately. This is the considered way that I see it and I would encourage all of you to present your view of our scene wherever possible. It is important to remember that my fieldwork was undertaken as something of a snapshot during the period 2007-9 and that, hopefully, as a result of my work, things move on.

For a non-Jewish musician to be so involved in Jewish music in the UK is a testament to the impressive work of Geraldine Auerbach, MBE. She has built a remarkable

organisation and team in the Jewish Music Institute and I hope that this work stands as a small tribute to this as she retires as director.

It is no surprise that Barry Davis' name is associated with so many fine projects concerning Yiddish and klezmer. The speed with which he read my draft and provided a plethora of informed and considered insights demonstrates the enthusiasm that he has for the subject. Without him, I would have been quite lost.

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## **Abstract**

The Real Deal is a term often used by musicians to describe people they perceive to be more authentic than them. Over the past seven or eight years, I have performed music from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Turkey and beyond under the umbrella of World Music in one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world: London. As I negotiated my way onto this scene and played with some of the finest musicians, I became increasingly aware of those I felt to be the Real Deal. I also began to feel that, in certain circumstances, I may also have appeared to be the Real Deal to others. Many of the musicians on this scene had begun their foray into these diverse styles with klezmer and it is this style that I explore most with relation to the Real Deal. As klezmer is a Jewish music style not played, or even enjoyed, by all Jews, this makes notions of the Real Deal much more ambiguous.

This thesis examines the movable perception that is the Real Deal and the complex interplay that results between musicians. Through discussions with twenty musicians with whom I have played regularly, I discussed the Real Deal and how it affects the way we work. Although half of the musicians self-identified as being Jewish and the other half did not, this became only one factor in the complex negotiations involved in professional music making. The often amusing anecdotes of mistaken identity that we shared raised fundamental questions about our stage performances.

I examine the complex issues surrounding klezmer as a style of music and the unique scene that has developed from the American revival in London. I consider the role of the Jewish Music Institute and how it serves the Jewish community and professional musicians in London and beyond. Finally, I assess how my discussions with musicians and the Jewish Music Institute have not only changed and shaped this evolving scene, but forced me to question my own attitudes and practice.



## **Declaration**

For the purposes of a thesis submitted for the degree of PhD to City University, London:  
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Paul Steven Tkachenko

London, March 2013

## **Chapter One**

### **Outline of thesis**

As a professional musician, I have become acutely aware of the fact that authenticity is an important aspect of my work. In particular, I have noticed that many musicians used the term ‘the Real Deal’ to denote those who they believed to be the most authentic. It became clear that, although the Real Deal is synonymous with authenticity, it holds a specific set of meanings for musicians. I presented twenty musicians with a graph that allowed us to loosely plot perceptions of authenticity and I used this to stimulate discussion. This formed the basis of my fieldwork and allowed me to identify musicians’ attitudes towards the Real Deal. I present these findings and show the importance that this has for the working practices of klezmer musicians in London.

As the style of klezmer is seen as a Jewish music style, this became an important consideration, not least because it is played and enjoyed by many non-Jews. The infrastructure as set up by the Jewish Music Institute (JMI) has nurtured the majority of klezmer musicians and has been of considerable importance to the scene: I document and assess this. The complex issues concerning who and what is perceived to be ‘Jewish’ dominated my fieldwork and became an important part of my research. A number of other issues were raised as part of my fieldwork, such as social class, and I relate this to wider trends in World Music listening.

As a result of this engagement with musicians, I set out to ascertain what musicians’ attitudes to the Real Deal are. Do these attitudes affect the way we work together in one of the world’s largest and multicultural cities? Klezmer has been adopted as a Jewish music; but what importance is placed, by musicians and audiences alike, on those performing the music who are to be perceived as the Real Deal, i.e. Jewish? How are these perceptions contended and negotiated and what markers are used to form them?

## **The basic problem: being real**

On 21 January 2003, whilst living in Germany, I changed my surname. The reasons for this were, in part, dissatisfaction with my old surname, it was a bit of fun, and also it was an attempt to embrace the culture of my now wife, who is Ukrainian. Tkachenko is a common surname in Ukraine and the 'enko' suffix is particularly identifiable as coming from that part of the world. I was born in Lancaster in the North of England, to English parentage and, although I have spent much of my life overseas,<sup>1</sup> I consider myself English.

This presented a problem in that people's perceptions about my heritage based on my surname did not fit the reality. This was compounded by the fact that, shortly after changing my name, I moved to London where people were unaware of my previous surname. As a professional musician establishing myself on a new scene in London, I became acutely aware of how people were reacting to my surname. This was further compounded by the fact that I found myself playing at quite a lot of Eastern European music gigs where other musicians were particularly interested in my surname. This took on an added dimension when I began playing klezmer and people often assumed that I might be Jewish as well.

As might be expected, I have a fair understanding of Ukrainian culture, having spent quite a bit of time in Kiev visiting my wife's relatives over the past eight years. I also worked for one year in a large Jewish secondary school in London in 2004/5, which exposed me to the local Jewish culture. In casual conversation, people might be forgiven for assuming that I have a Ukrainian Jewish background.

This dilemma is perhaps best illustrated by an example taken from my work as a musician. Whilst performing a show at the Gypsy-themed night *Le Vagabond Boogaloo*

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<sup>1</sup> One year in Australia, five years in Hong Kong, four of which were spent in an English boarding school, and thirteen years in Germany.

*Club* at Barden's Boudoir in Stoke Newington, London, with She'koyokh on 11 May 2007, a woman in the audience called out for us to 'play something Ukrainian'. Susi Evans, the clarinet player, jokingly mentioned that I was Ukrainian, despite knowing that I am not. There was no denying the woman's elation at this 'fact' and the next tune was presented as being Ukrainian, although it was in fact a Balkan tune.

After the concert, the woman came to me and wanted to know more about my supposed Ukrainian heritage and the nineteenth-century *kobzari* blind bards<sup>2</sup> that she was studying for a drama project. Such was her enthusiasm that I evaded any discussion about my heritage and answered her questions about the bards as fully as I could. She was clearly happy at having met a 'real' Ukrainian, although I felt I had not been entirely honest with her.

The above example raises several points. Clearly, I had met her expectations of a Ukrainian musician; I played the music as she had expected it and I was able to answer questions afterwards. As far as she was concerned, I was the 'real deal' and this validated her positive experiences on that evening. Of course, moral questions about whether I should have deceived her or not were on my mind but, in terms of her expectations, I had added to her enjoyment of the evening.

The commercial world is full of slogans and advertisements claiming products and services to be 'real' and 'authentic' in order to coerce consumers into validating their experience as something worthwhile and unmediated, much like the musical experience that the woman above had. She wanted me to be Ukrainian and I fed her expectations - or, at least, what I perceived them to be. It should also be considered that I performed as 'authentically' as I could, using my knowledge of Eastern European music, without being seen as a fake or not being true to myself by perhaps speaking with a heavy Slavic accent.

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<sup>2</sup> See Kononenko, 1998.

I began casually discussing this with my fellow musicians, mostly after gigs, and this often prompted lively debate. Not only were the musicians very interested in how authentic we were perceived to be by audiences, but they were also curious about how authentic we perceived each other. It became apparent that any kind of research surveying audience response to such issues would be a massive undertaking. I was aware that there is such a broad demographic at gigs that the responses would be difficult to categorise. How could I even be sure that people would tell the truth? However, so animated was the debate with my colleagues that I decided this in itself would be a valuable research topic. In addition, I felt that I was in a position whereby my colleagues were also my friends and I trusted them to be frank and honest with me. Naturally, issues of impartiality would be a concern, but I chose to put this to one side. I felt that, if my anthropological research was perceived by my colleagues as - and as Herzfeld has labelled it - 'the study of common sense' (2001, p.1), then not only would I have succeeded in convincing them of the validity of my research, but they would remain my friends and I would continue to work with them. To further quote Herzfeld:

The intimacy of the ethnographic encounter generally prompted ethnographers to adopt an affirmative attitude toward the people studied, and even to write accounts of their culture that were to some degree complicit in dominant local understandings. This has been a powerful tenet since Malinowski, and Boas had even argued that folk narrative was a people's own ethnography – a view that has resurfaced today in the explicit genre of 'auto-ethnography', which allows a measure of self-examination to the anthropologist who is also willing to listen to local theorizing of society and culture and to acknowledge them as such.

(Herzfeld, 2001, p.25)

A large part of this study is auto-ethnography and the musicians I spoke with, several of whom are engaged in similar ethnomusicological research, have not simply sat under the magnifying glass; they have shaped this research. I, therefore, concerned myself with how these issues affect the musicians with whom I work, how we interact and how being perceived as the Real Deal might play a part in how we interrelate.

## Literature review

The Real Deal is a type of authenticity. There are many different strands to the study of authenticity, all of which will have some bearing on the current work. However, I am particularly concerned with market forces that may influence the way musicians may treat each other. For this reason, the book *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (Gilmore and Pine, 2007) has been particularly useful in identifying the appeal of the Real Deal, as it advocates promoting perceived authenticity in business to increase sales. As well as breaking down what it is that consumers see as authentic, it suggests several business strategies that will allow managers to hopefully increase sales. As a musician, I am curious to what extent these strategies and ideas are pertinent to the work that I do. A number of books such as Boyle's *Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life* (2003) and Crofts' *Authentic: How to make a living by being yourself* (2003) also deal with this business aspect of authenticity.

My definition of 'professional' is that the musicians I interviewed rely on performance as their main source of income. Cottrell sums up the wider community of professional musicians in London and points to the diverse backgrounds:

There are, I suspect, a greater number of musicians in the city than anywhere else, who feed into a plethora of different musical performance events. ... Some of these musicians will have had... what I would describe as a conventional Western musical education... many others have worked their way up, particularly in the jazz and pop field, where conventional musical qualifications count even less than elsewhere; still others may provide music to ethnic groups in this multicultural city.

(2004, p.8)

As I indicate below, many klezmer musicians have a relatively conventional Western musical background and the gradual institutionalisation of klezmer is an important factor in the professional development of these musicians. Although qualifications do exist and given little value on the scene, the networking that results from such training is still an important factor in the professional life of the musicians.

The music industry or business is a powerful influence in the work of professional musicians and, in this particular case, the genre of World Music has been central to issues of authenticity. Barker and Taylor's book *Faking it: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music* (2007) is useful in surveying popular music and culture from a standpoint of authenticity and places the development of World Music in a socio-historical context. Taylor, in *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (1997), has dedicated a section to authenticity and Moore's article in *Popular Music* 'Authenticity as authentication' (2002) echoes many of the feelings of being the Real Deal mentioned above.

Almost any recent ethnomusicological study will touch on issues of authenticity, but some have discussed authenticity in more detail, often as a result of the diaspora groups studied. Laušević (2007) looks at how Balkan music has become popular in the USA and how the creation of a group of non-Balkan musicians reifies the Real Deal to be any musician, or person coming from the Balkans.

There is a body of literature concerning issues of identity and authenticity with regard to Judaism and klezmer. Gruber's book, *Virtually Jewish* (2002), looks at reasons why non-Jews engage with Jewish culture, often in a more fervent manner than Jews themselves. This highlights the multifarious reasons why people become fascinated with cultures outside of their own and can potentially privilege those who are, often by the nature of their upbringing, the Real Deal. The work of Slobin (2000a and 2002) as well as Freedman (2008) is useful in tracing the development of klezmer in the USA, particularly with regard to identity and the shaping of what is seen as authentic.

A number of recent books deal with the general concept of authenticity and the various strands of the debate. Lindholm's (2008) *Culture and Authenticity* approaches the topic from a wide range of cultural standpoints that are particularly pertinent to the current study. Vannini and Williams (2009) take an approach that concentrates on philosophy, with particular emphasis on the authenticity of self. I also acknowledge the important work of Charles Taylor and Peter Kivy in developing current thought on authenticity.

Finally, some works make mention of the reasons scholars began studying ‘their own cultures of inquiry, deconstructing the ways their disciplinary subject was constituted historically and examining the mechanisms and strategies through which authoritative knowledge is produced’ (Bendix, 1997, p.4). There is a challenge inherent in such study in that the link between authentic and authoritative knowledge is strong. There is an aspect to this current work that challenges existing tensions between the authority of ‘authentic’ knowledge of native, or those claiming an emic perspective, and the etic scholars that are unable, on account of their personal circumstances, to assert this ‘authentic authority’.

By formalising discussions with musicians with whom I play professionally, I discern to what extent issues of perceived authenticity (the Real Deal) affect the way we interact with each other. From these discussions, I highlight the main themes and use three bands as case studies to demonstrate how these issues are significant in the functioning of the scene.

### **Conduct of fieldwork**

This project was principally motivated by conversations with other musicians whilst returning home from gigs. As one would expect, the content of these discussions varied enormously and such discussions highlighted how strongly the musicians with whom I work feel about these issues and how profoundly they affect the work that we do. I approached twenty musicians during the period 2007-2009 and spoke to them in very general terms about the Real Deal and their experiences. Initially, I was keen to hear any stories of mistaken identity but, as my research progressed, I began using the Real Deal graph (Figure 2, Chapter 2) to prompt further discussion.

The structure of these conversations was very loose and discourse often bilateral. Often, questions were directed back to me despite the fact that I attempted to keep the focus away from my own experiences. Naturally, this prompted significant self-reflection and I endeavour to show this below. I grappled with a consistent term for the musicians with



whom I formally spoke. 'Interviewee' seemed to be a little one-sided, 'informant' suggested betrayal and 'participant' intimated a more structured agenda. Therefore, throughout this study, I have not been consistent with how these musicians are addressed; I hope, instead, the context will make it clear. Initially, I divided the musicians broadly into 'outsiders' and 'insiders' although, as the project developed, it became easier to divide the musicians into those who self-identified as being Jewish and those who did not. As I sought my final interviews, I was able to see some trends in the discussions and the number was a convenient twenty - ten who self-identified as being Jewish and ten who didn't.

To ensure that the musicians could speak freely, I have tried to make the quotes anonymous wherever possible. I have removed the names of instruments that might be used to identify players. I acknowledge that there may be some people who want to study, for instance, attitudes towards violinists. I can only apologise for this and assure the reader that the informants were not selected on the basis of the instrument they played, although I endeavoured to strike a fair balance.

I made an audio recording of each session, the shortest of which was about half an hour and the longest over two. I then transcribed each interview in full including my questions, observations and answers. The venues for these interviews varied considerably from car journeys to cafes, and from homes to concert halls. Wherever possible, I paid for food and drink as a gesture of goodwill but also to encourage informality. As Monson (1996) also discovered, musicians are used to being interviewed although, more often than not, with a journalistic approach where self-promotion is foremost in the mind. Ironically, as I gained a greater understanding of how these musicians think and vice versa, I also gained more work with them. I discuss the impact this had on my research below.

I continued to work with these musicians after my fieldwork was completed and many of these discussions are ongoing. I am, therefore, confident that I have a reasonable enough understanding to represent the musicians fairly. It was difficult at times to know when the fieldwork had concluded, particularly as musicians' opinions seemed to develop over the

course of the study. Wherever possible, I have tried to back up each musician's opinion with a direct quote that I feel best represents them. I have also included a number of quotes where musicians have been critical or dismissive of this study and the reasons why: this in itself is of interest.

## Defining a scene

The greatest problem in defining any scene lies in the criteria for inclusion. Who should be included and why? I decided that the defining criterion would be those musicians with whom I have played professionally and regularly since moving to London. In reality, this is a large number of musicians and so I began with just one band, She'koyokh. The advantage was that the band had an easily traceable starting point and is, in many ways, the archetypal product of initiatives by the JMI. As my own involvement in the Jewish music scene in London increased, it seemed fitting that a number of other musicians should be interviewed, all who know and play with each other, and all with whom I have played. This study is, therefore, undertaken from a perspective of looking from the inside out. As a result, I must dispose of what Nercessian (2002) has called the “purity” that might come from a distinct emic-etic dichotomy’ (p.13). However, I feel that this is an inevitable as well as integral element to the study and such relationships developed throughout the project. As Nercessian points out, the emic-etic dichotomy remains a useful methodological tool. I work, therefore, within Titon’s framework (in Barz and Cooley, 1997, pp.87-100) that ‘fieldwork need not involve travel to a distant place – “fieldwork” can be playing music with other individuals and the “field” that shared experience’ (p.16). Cottrell has pointed to a number of prominent ‘native anthropologists’ (2004, p.16) and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of this approach:

This leads to what Mascarenhas-Keyes calls ‘professionally induced schizophrenia between the ‘native self’ and ‘professional self’, a necessary consequence, perhaps, of the attempt to see one’s own culture as strange.  
(*ibid.*)

It became clear early on that ‘interviewing’ was not entirely accurate as these musicians, as well as being my colleagues, were also my friends. The majority of them are well-educated and have also undertaken a great deal of ethnomusicological research, either formally or informally.<sup>3</sup> Whilst their friendship allowed for frankness, there was also a strong discursive element to the sessions. This aspect of the study blurs the emic-etic

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<sup>3</sup> This echoes Cottrell’s (2004) experience when told ‘you do realise that some of these people... are very intelligent, easily capable of a PhD’ (p.19).

divide as I am researching from the inside out, by placing myself at the centre of my own study. I acknowledge this and have tried to remain, as does every conscientious ethnomusicologist, impartial. I do believe, however, that my close relationships with my informants and relatively informal and open-ended research methods have helped shape the project in a two-way manner.

The heritages of my informants are complicated and so I have kept any information general. At the risk of over-simplifying, it is perhaps useful to know that half of my informants are Jewish with varying levels of observance and half are from a variety of different heritages, with the most common being Anglo-Saxon. There is one Serbian and one Kurdish-Turk on the non-Jewish side and two South Africans who have been living in the UK for a long time on the Jewish side. Only five were female, which is largely reflective of the scene that I work in,<sup>4</sup> which has a greater percentage of males. It is perhaps interesting that many readers may look at the names in order to discern who fits into which category. I found that any attempt to categorise the musicians in a more rigorous manner proved problematic as there are so many variables, such as educational background and political beliefs.

All of my informants were told that direct quotes would be anonymous, unless I ask them for permission to refer to a particular individual. I will also endeavour to keep the quotes general and not allow their contexts to identify the speakers. Invariably, as some of my informants read this, they may recognise the manner of speech of some of their colleagues. I am wary of quotes that might cause animosity and am mindful of this. The public nature of the work of a professional musician means that a certain amount of information is available about all of the performers, mostly via the World Wide Web, and any personal information I reveal will not exceed what can be found there.

The more I recorded discussions with musicians, the more the musicians began to discuss with each other the themes and issues and this created an interesting evolving effect on

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<sup>4</sup> In many strands of orthodox Judaism, there is a dominance of male musicians and many adult orthodox male Jews are not permitted to hear women singing, a prohibition called *kol isha*.

my research. From an early stage, I noticed that a quote from a website was changed based on what we had discussed. Initially, I had planned to do a structured interview with directed questions and then give each of my informants a chance to respond to what I had written, but this proved to be too unwieldy. I felt it was also important that the discussion was not led by me, but was directed by my informants; this, in itself, revealed a great deal. Of course, I obliged when asked questions, although I stressed at the beginning of the discussions that it was more important to record their thoughts.

An interesting element to this research has been that the time spent discussing these issues has resulted in more work for me as a musician. The reasons for this may be simply that the meetings also served as a networking opportunity. The research that I have undertaken, particularly with regard to klezmer, has significantly informed my playing and this has no doubt improved my employability in the genre.

As a result of my interaction with these musicians, I became involved with the JMI. Initially, I was asked to be on the assistant faculty at the 2007 annual KlezFest, a five-day intensive course studying klezmer. It was the largest such course in Europe and was run in a similar fashion to the seminal KlezKamp in New York that has been running since 1985. In 2008, I became a teaching member of the faculty and taught the brass class, which included teaching the head of music at one of the largest Jewish secondary schools in London about klezmer. In 2009, after a funding cut, the JMI were not able to fund the costs of bringing over the American artists as they had done in previous years. I was then asked to teach a good deal more and found myself teaching some of the more advanced sessions. This, of course, raised many questions about the transmission and advocating of the style. Nevertheless, it placed me in an advantageous position to write about the klezmer scene in London.

In the first few months of 2009, I became involved with an initiative at Hampstead Synagogue called the *Klezmer Hoyz* (lit. Klezmer House). The idea was to promote klezmer to Jewish youth in the area. I was familiar with the lack of interest that the Jewish youth in London generally show towards klezmer from my experience working at

a Jewish secondary school; they generally favour Israeli pop music. I sat upon the committee for this project and was involved in the organisation of a series of workshops and also helped organise a large *purim*<sup>5</sup> party and dance. Mostly due to a lack of interest from the local community and the synagogue, this project ended after the *purim* party.

During the project, I was asked if I would undertake the maintenance of the JMI's website. I started to do this in early 2009 and found it to be an excellent way of keeping informed of all events relating to Jewish music in and around London. It has also raised my profile on the Jewish music scene in London, allowing me to say that I worked for the JMI.

I have also been involved as a technician at a number of large Jewish events in London, such as the 'Reaching the soul: what is prayer in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?' seminar at The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) on 2 November 2008 and also a concert at Wembley synagogue on 7 December 2008 featuring cantorial singing. This allowed me to become involved with several events on an organisational level as well as a performer.

All of the musicians have, to a greater or lesser extent, been influenced by the JMI. It, therefore, made sense to also interview the director, Geraldine Auerbach.

The musicians interviewed are as follows. I have placed the JMI director at the top, which is representative of her influence on the other musicians. The rest are, however, in no particular order:

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<sup>5</sup> A festival in Judaism that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people of ancient Persia from a plot to annihilate them.

## JMI

Geraldine Auerbach, director

## She'koyokh

Çiğdem Aslan, vocals  
Susi Evans, clarinet  
Matt Bacon, guitar  
Jim Marcovitch, accordion  
Fraser Watson, percussion  
Meg Hamilton, violin

## FDT/

## Hopkele Productions

Ilana Cravitz, violin  
Guy Schalom, percussion

## Gadjo Club

Dave Shulman, sax

## Bučimis

Toby Nowell, Trumpet

## The Matzoh Boys

Peter Michaels, vocals  
Jake Painter, trumpet  
Minouche Kaftel, vocals

## Mukka

Rastko Rasic, percussion  
Frank Biddulph, violin  
Pete Watson, accordion

## The Yiddish Twist Orchestra

Jonathan Walton, trumpet  
Ben Mandelson, guitar  
Merlin Shepherd, clarinet/saxophone

Figure 1 *The musicians I interviewed from the scene*

## The Jewish Music Institute

The Jewish Music Institute (JMI) was established by Geraldine Auerbach after a Jewish Music Festival in 1984 which was organised by Bnai Brith, a pro-Jewish organisation with roots in nineteenth-century Masonic lodges. A trust was established in 1985 that eventually became the JMI. The notion of an organisation concerned with the promotion of distinctly Jewish music has its roots in late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century Russia and the work of Anton Rubenstein around the St Petersburg conservatoire. Loeffler (2010) sums up the activities of 'The Society for Jewish Folk Music' between 1908 and 1919 as:

Yiddish- and Hebrew-language folk songs, Hasidic nigunim, instrumental klezmer selections, and liturgical prayers, all appeared. Before 1913 the only musical sources explicitly excluded were compositions based on 'pseudo-folk music, fragments of *badkhn* song, wretched fragments of foul Jewish operettas and so forth'.

(p.130)

This is a surprisingly broad range of musical sources and, although there were elements of the Society that held Zionist beliefs, it is interesting to see how Jewish music was represented before the State of Israel and the Holocaust.

Basing itself at SOAS, at the University of London, the JMI has a surprising amount in common with the earlier Russian Society for Jewish Folk Music in St Petersburg in the way that it promotes and supports the Jewish community.

A number of events and activities organised by the JMI are important in this study, as the JMI website states:



**Grants and Scholarships** (established 1985) JMI has helped students and scholars to attend conferences and study Jewish music abroad (China, Hungary, Lithuania, USA). Since 2000 JMI has granted 58 JMI Millennium Awards for projects in Jewish music throughout the country with funds from the National Lottery. JMI also give scholarships to attend JMI Jewish music summer schools, courses and conferences in the UK.

(Accessed online  
<http://www.jmi.org.uk/htdocs/about/history.html>  
March 30 2012)

She’koyokh is the product of such a Millennium award. These grants have allowed many musicians, including several of my interviewees, to attend klezmer courses and conferences, mainly KlezFest London. This extended to music teachers who are Jewish or who work at Jewish Schools being encouraged to attend KlezFest. As a result of this, the head of music from JFS<sup>6</sup> (The Jews’ Free School) turned up at my brass session at KlezFest with his tuba. This was a particularly interesting situation, as his knowledge of Judaism and Jewish music in general far exceeded my own. However, he knew little about klezmer, which surprised me. It was an interesting week and we found it to be mutually beneficial.

The JMI also lists on the website a number of ‘performing groups’ that they feel they have had a role in forming and promoting:

**Performing Groups** (established (1986) The Shabbaton Choir (1986) Gregory Schechter’s Klezmer Festival Band (1991) the Jewish Heritage Youth Choir (1995) and Shekoyokh Klezmer Ensemble (2002) have been established and promoted through the activities of JMI.

(Accessed online  
<http://www.jmi.org.uk/htdocs/about/history.html>  
March 30 2012)

Youth choirs have played an important part in the JMI’s history, no doubt helping the community feel that ‘tradition’ is being passed down to the next generation. Interestingly,

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<sup>6</sup> The largest Jewish secondary school in Europe. In 2013, I also got a job teaching there.

these choirs demonstrate a lack of interest in Eastern European Ashkenazi musical tradition and, instead, focus on choral repertoire sung in Hebrew. The activities of Stephen Glass cannot be overstated here. He started his career directing synagogue choirs in North London, but moved in 1990 to Quebec to work for the Shaar Hashomayim synagogue. However, he often returns to the UK to direct choirs, often with the financial backing of the JMI and other organisations. His musical arrangements are a mainstay with Jewish choirs in the UK and appear to promote a form of Zionism reflective of the reform synagogue in the UK. This is significant in that there is an implied rejection of Eastern European Ashkenazi in this repertoire, which is bound to have an impact on the young people involved in such choirs. Klezmer music and associated Yiddish song seems to have no place in the repertoire of these choirs. As a result, the promotion of klezmer by the JMI seems to be at odds with the repertoire encouraged by these youth choirs. Although not of direct importance to this study, such choral work serves as a reminder of an important musical aspect of Jewish life in London.

Central to the academic legitimacy of the JMI is the academic post that it subsidises, first at City University (1991-1999) and then at SOAS (1999-). The 'Joe Loss Lectureship in Jewish Music' was held first by Alexander Knapp (1999-2006) and by Abigail Wood (2006-). The JMI has an office at SOAS, where a modest library of books and recordings is kept. A number of courses in Jewish music continue to be run at SOAS, with klezmer well represented. SOAS has also funded many concerts of klezmer over the years and some of the musicians I interviewed have studied at SOAS, although none specifically studied Jewish music.

Perhaps the most visible manifestation of the JMI has been the KlezFest summer schools that ran from 2001-2010. As well as a residential, week-long course of instrumental workshops, there was a 'Klezmer Klimax' concert featuring the faculty. There was also a week-long Yiddish language course that ran either before or after KlezFest. As well as providing a platform for bands to form and develop, KlezFest served as a useful meeting point for klezmer musicians from across Europe who converged at the course.

At the end of 2011, Geraldine Auerbach stepped down as director of the JMI and was succeeded by Sophie Solomon in a role as ‘artistic’ director. Solomon rose to prominence as the violinist of the pop band *Oy Va Voi*. Jennifer Jankel, the daughter of Joe Loss, took a more prominent role as the chair of trustees.

## **Background information on the bands**

### **She’koyokh<sup>7</sup>**

The core members of the band met at the first KlezFest in 2001 and received tuition from Merlin Shepherd and from Ilana Cravitz. The band was consolidated by Louise Taylor, who received a Millennium Award from the JMI to put together an eight-piece klezmer band as part of her MMus degree at SOAS.

The instrumentation at the time of the interviews:

- Clarinet (**Susi Evans**)
- Violin (**Meg Hamilton**)
- Guitar (**Matt Bacon**)
- Mandolin
- Trombone
- Double bass
- Percussion
- Accordion (until 2008) (**Jim Marcovitch**)
- Vocals (2008 onwards) (**Çiğdem Aslan**)

The band is a mix of self-taught musicians and highly-trained conservatoire graduates. They perform at a range of events such as festivals, weddings (both Jewish and non-Jewish), *barmitzvahs* and concert halls.

On 17 October 2008, the accordionist Jim Marcovitch died and, soon afterwards, the Kurdish/Turkish vocalist Çiğdem Aslan joined. This inevitably changed the dynamic of the group, which was an interesting development to witness as the band’s focus shifted

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<sup>7</sup> Lit. ‘may your strength continue’ in Yiddish.

from klezmer to more Balkan and Turkish traditions. In 2008, the band won first place in the International Jewish Music Competition held in Amsterdam.

Two members of the band are Jewish, although both only on the father's side. As I will discuss later, the importance of a matrilineal line in Judaism holds great importance for some.

I have performed with She'koyokh on double bass, tuba, vocals and accordion at a wide range of gigs. I have also performed with members of the group in other bands, mostly FDT Klezmerim/Hopkele with Ilana Cravitz and Guy Schalom.

In late 2009, shortly after the trombonist left the band, I joined She'koyokh full-time on accordion and, later, also on vocals. This development saw the research that I had undertaken being used by the band in a practical way in order to assess effectiveness of the work that they do. In late 2011, the double bass player left and I then became the double bass player in the band.

### **The Matzoh Boys**

As an initiative of trumpeter Jake Painter and guitarist Peter Michaels, who met in Manchester whilst studying, The Matzoh Boys formed when both musicians moved to London and were looking for a way to make money from music.

The emphasis is on highly-functional music for Jewish *simchas*.<sup>8</sup> The instrumentation is as follows:

- Trumpet (**Jake Painter**)
- Guitar (**Peter Michaels**)
- Violin
- Bass guitar

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<sup>8</sup> Lit. 'joy' in Hebrew, generally used to mean party or celebration.

I have performed with The Matzoh Boys on bass guitar and guitar, mainly at weddings (both Jewish and non-Jewish) and *bar* and *batmitzvahs*, but also at other formal events. Later, I also appeared as a vocalist, initially singing jazz. This was extended to singing in Hebrew for the dancing, which forms an important part of many events where The Matzoh Boys perform.

The emphasis of such gigs is always on the functionality of the music over any academic study of klezmer. There is often a background jazz element to the performances and ‘Israeli’ dancing is often requested, invariably with a strong dance beat indicative of the modern Israeli 4/4 *hora*, which is diametrically opposed to the slow, lilting 3/4 Romanian-influenced klezmer *hora*.

Half of the band is Jewish and one musician is Brazilian.

### **The Yiddish Twist Orchestra**

This is a concept band developed by trumpeter **Jonathan Walton** (who leads the band under the stage name of Lemez Lovas) and guitarist/producer Ben Mandelson. The instrumentation is:

- Trumpet (**Jonathan Walton**)
- Saxophone/clarinet
- Trombone
- Keyboards
- Electric guitar (**Ben Mandelson**)
- Bass guitar
- Drum kit (**Guy Schalom**)

The concept is to recreate and develop twist versions of Yiddish songs from the late 1950s and early 1960s in the style of Solomon Schwartz and Dick Dale. Conceptually, the band performs as a tribute to the fictitious 1960s London-based band leader Willie<sup>9</sup> Bergman, about whom much reference is made in the publicity material. There is a great

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<sup>9</sup> Spelled ‘Willy’ by the Yiddish Twist Orchestra.

deal of attention given to creating a myth surrounding the elusive Bergman on the internet and in the promotion of the band. The concept of the band owes much to the legacy of the band *3 Mustaphas 3* of which Mandelson was a member as alter-ego 'Hicaz Mustapha'.

I have played bass guitar with this band and all of the core musicians are highly established players on the klezmer scene, although the music makes only a passing stylistic reference to klezmer. Although the instrumentation remained the same, many of the klezmer musicians were later replaced by regular session musicians, many who are not Jewish.

In the original line-up, apart from two of the musicians (including myself), all of the band are Jewish. This line-up recorded a live demo CD called 'Yiddish Twist Orchestra plays Willy Bergman'.

### **Other bands**

I have grouped the other musicians under a number of other bands, but they have all played in at least one of the three core bands and some have played in all three. Although I make fewer references to these bands, I describe them here to provide context. It was difficult to secure interviews with every band member in every band and so the choice of musician was largely down to availability although, some way into my fieldwork, I realised that close to half of the interviewed musicians were Jewish and half not. Although quite unscientific, it seemed to be loosely representative of the scene. Some of the musicians with whom I spoke did not play in any of the three main bands, yet were active on the scene in question and I describe their main bands below and have highlighted their names in bold in order that their position on the scene is made clear.

**Ilana Cravitz** formed **FDT Klezmerim**, which performs at various functions and also gives concerts and workshops. As well as using members of She'koyokh, Cravitz also uses many musicians from the klezmer scene in London. **Hopkele Productions** was a

venture set up by Cravitz and percussionist/dancer **Guy Schalom** in 2007 to organise ‘Klezmer Ceilidhs’, events where folk dancing was taught accompanied by live klezmer music. Cravitz has also been central in organising the **London Klezmer Orchestra**, a group of amateurs who meet to explore the music in a larger, any-instrument ensemble.

**Bučimis**<sup>10</sup> was a side project<sup>11</sup> of She’koyokh members **Susi Evans** and **Matt Bacon** to explore Balkan music, together with trumpet player **Toby Nowell**, with whom I have played a good deal of Balkan music. Since the death of Jim Marcovitch, She’koyokh began to play more Balkan and Turkish-influenced music and (as of 2009) Bučimis became something of a redundant project.

**Gadjo Club** is run by classical violinist Phillip Granell (under the stage name of Chancery Blame) and the clarinet/saxophone player **Dave Shulman** who has also recorded and performed with She’koyokh. As well as performing on accordion with Gadjo Club in 2010, I have also performed at a number of Jewish functions with Dave Shulman.

The band **Mukka** has a similar repertoire to She’koyokh, although the average age of the band members is about 10 years older. Although I have not performed with **Mukka**, I have performed with the violinist **Frank Biddulph** on a number of occasions in medieval shows and an Irish band, as well as with the Matzoh Boys. Oliver Baldwin, the bass player with She’koyokh and for whom I have often deputised and, subsequently replaced, is a founder member of Mukka. **Rastko Rasic** is the percussionist with Mukka. In recent years, Mukka seem to have stopped performing (or, as one of the members of the band put it, ‘faded into parenthood’). Formed at a similar time was the **Balkanatics**, fronted and organised by jazz saxophonist Ian East. Rastko Rasic currently drums for them and **Pete Watson**, under the pseudonym **Petro Dewshi**, plays accordion.

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<sup>10</sup> The correct transliteration, of the Bulgarian fifteen-beat dance, is Bučimiš (Бучимиш).

<sup>11</sup> They produced one album, ‘Bučimis: The Electric Balkan Band’ (2006).

Another important band on the scene is **Dunav**, which was the first band in the UK to specialise in Eastern European music. Oliver Baldwin's father, John, was a founder member. **Çiğdem Aslan** of She'koyokh also sings with the current incarnation of the group.

Although not a regular group, **Rumpelstilzstein** is a stilt-walking klezmer band that I assembled for large JMI events, such as Simcha in the Square and Klezmer in the Park. The material draws on the most stereotypical of Jewish music and foregrounds tunes such as *Hava Nagila*. As I discuss below, the dress is also stereotypical. It is not important for the musicians to be familiar with the nuances of klezmer and the musical skill requirements are somewhat lower than for an 'off stilt' band.

Although I have not played with either **Kosmos** or **Paprika** (formerly Paprika Balkanikus), both of these groups are an important influence on the scene. Kosmos is a string trio (violin, violin/viola and cello), which includes She'koyokh violinist **Meg Hamilton**. Paprika is a group of mostly Balkan musicians who have been influential on the Eastern European music scene in London. **Rastko Rasic** plays drums with them.

Although I had limited contact with her during my fieldwork time, Gundula Gruen, who leads the **London Gypsy Orchestra** and compiled a collection of Gypsy music for violin (2007), remains an important and influential figure on the scene. During the period 2010-11, I performed on accordion and vocals with **Tatcho Drom**, a five-piece Gypsy music group, playing much of the repertoire of the London Gypsy Orchestra at professional engagements. I also provided sound and technical support for a number of London Gypsy Orchestra events, including the *Opa Cupa*<sup>12</sup> open days at the home of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, Cecil Sharp House.

In the next chapter I will define the Real Deal, a concept with which I began my discussions with musicians. More often than not, this led to lively debate.

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<sup>12</sup> An encouraging call to dance in Serbian.



## **Chapter Two**

### **A Definition of the Real Deal**

*The Real Deal: someone who is perceived to represent the culture of the music they play in a way that is genuine and unmediated. This is executed in a way that is understood by others to be for personal convictions, rather than purely for commercial gain. They will also be able to support, in performance, any preconceptions that audiences might have about heritage.*

All of the musicians with whom I spoke were familiar with the term Real Deal and my definition above is derived from my fieldwork. In this chapter, I frame the Real Deal within the broader concept of authenticity and examine the importance of this on the London klezmer scene. Fitting into the broad category of World Music, I show how professional klezmer musicians demonstrate varying manifestations of the Real Deal in London.

### **The Real Deal Graph**

I began the majority of my interviews by discussing a graph which I had adapted from Gilmore and Pine's book *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (2007):

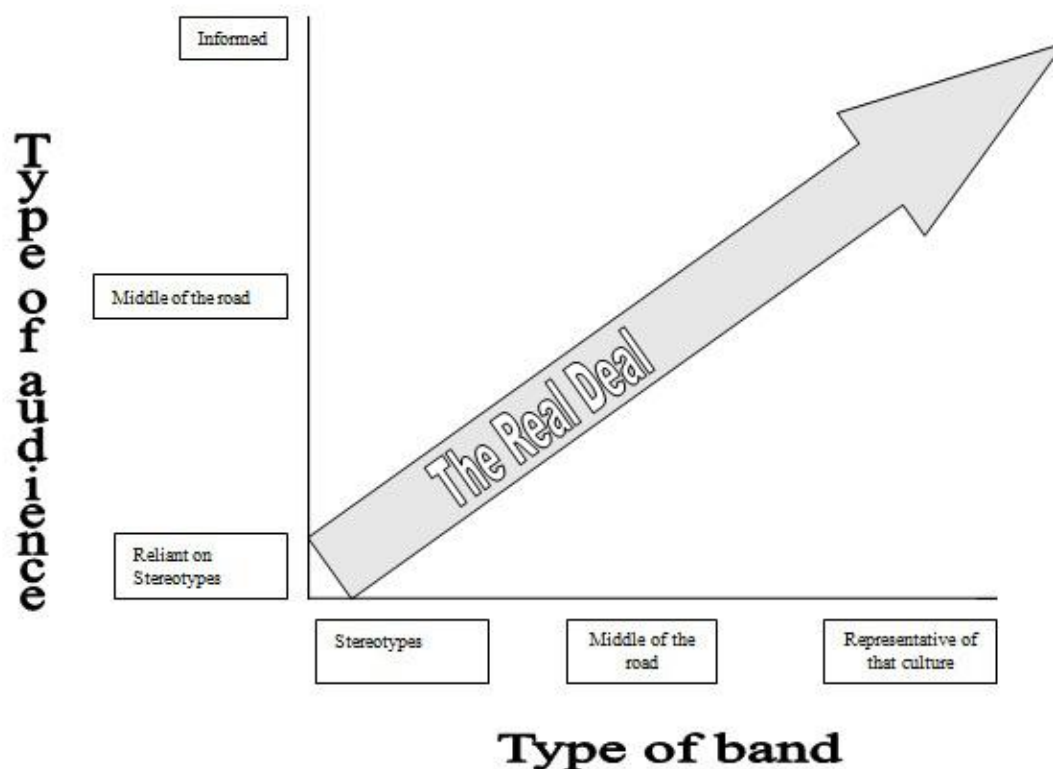


Figure 2 *The Real Deal Graph*

This allowed me to provide a conceptual framework within which to position various types of musicians against various types of audience. Such a graph cannot be considered scientific, but it proved useful as a starting point for discussion with my colleagues. Central to such a model is an understanding that the Real Deal is a variable perception of certain types of authenticity, one which changes depending on the type of audience versus the considered performance of the musician. It became clear that all the musicians I interviewed had considered this as an important aspect of their work. Taylor observes:

The problem is that there are multiple subject positions available to anyone and multiple interpretations and constructions of those positions.

(Taylor, 1997, p.21)

Particularly in audiences who are less informed about the culture and music that they are hearing, a certain trust must be placed in the performer in order that the experience might

be validated as being authentic by the listener. This is perhaps one reason why it is often the musician, rather than the event, that is seen as requiring Real Deal credentials.

Rather than ask *what* (piece of music, or activity) is being authenticated... I ask *who*?

(Moore, 2002, p.210)

I argue that the Real Deal could be seen as a theoretical ideal and attained when an audience's perceptions and expectations about authenticity are met by a musician. This often remains an enigma, as a musician is never able to know for sure if those expectations have been met. When, however, as in this study, the focus is on the musicians, this becomes easier to study and discuss.

The level of familiarity that an audience member will have with a certain culture and associated music may vary greatly. For instance, if the audience member only speaks English and the singing is in Turkish, the audience member is forced into accessing and identifying the music from other, more familiar, visual angles, such as the way the performer dresses. Often, this may result in problematic confusions, such as Kurdish<sup>13</sup> being mistaken for Turkish or Yiddish for German (both groups with a history of conflict). This may be advantageous for the musician who can, in the light of such ignorance, work convincingly in a wider sphere. Therefore, to use the previous example, it is possible to see Kurds performing Turkish music<sup>14</sup> and Germans performing Yiddish music<sup>15</sup> (and vice versa) if an audience is unable to discern the difference; they may still perceive that they are experiencing the Real Deal.

Conversely, at the more informed end of the spectrum, visual markers become less important as the audience is more likely to understand the language and is familiar with the musical stylistic traits. National dress is not required and, indeed, may well be detrimental to such a performance as the music becomes a more prominent, if not *the* most pertinent, validating criterion.

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<sup>13</sup> More likely Kumanji dialect.

<sup>14</sup> Tkachenko (2005) for example.

<sup>15</sup> Eckstaedt (2003) for example.

Central to an understanding of what is perceived as ‘authentic’ is the relationship between what is seen as ‘fake’ and ‘real’. Gilmore and Pine have developed a simple X/Y matrix<sup>16</sup> that they have termed the ‘Polonius<sup>17</sup> test’:

Is what it says it is	Real-fake	Real-real
Is not what it says it is	Fake-fake	Fake-real
	Is <i>not</i> true to itself	Is true to itself

Figure 3 *The Real/Fake Matrix*  
(Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p.97)

This serves as a useful framework for matching authenticity of self (the x axis) with a projection of authenticity (the y axis). Clearly, the most authentic will be ‘real-real’, but anything containing ‘real’ may be seen as potentially the Real Deal. Gilmore and Pine have also plotted the ‘Polonius Test’ on an *x/y* axis in order that the ‘polarity’ of authenticity can be positioned. This means that it is possible, in an unscientific and subjective way, to position something as real or fake and gauge the perceived authenticity. My labels make the assumption that the less informed about a culture someone is, the more reliant they are on stereotyping. I also acknowledge that ‘informed’ has a broader meaning and can also encompass a person’s musical training and experience. I propose that this simplification is necessary in order for the graph to serve its purpose, which is stimulating debate in the fieldwork interviews.

<sup>16</sup> Boyle (2003) also uses these terms, however.

<sup>17</sup> Referring to the character in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* who counsels his son Laertes about self truth.

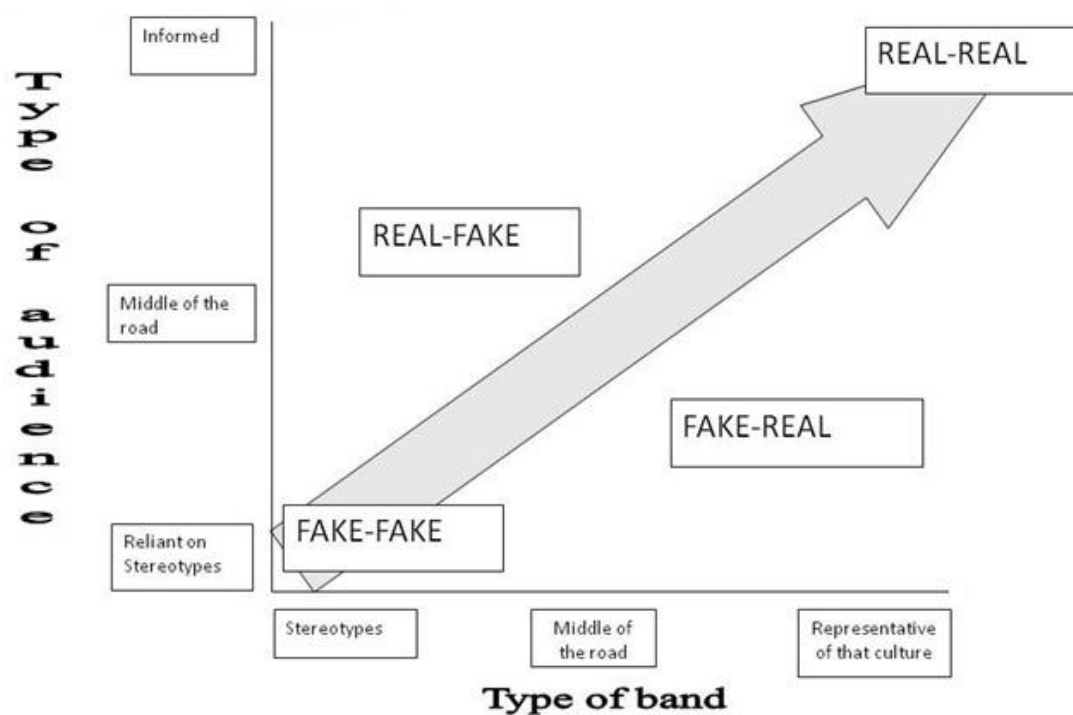


Figure 4 *The Polarity of Natural Authenticity Graph* (based on Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p.227)

Many musicians with whom I discussed the Real Deal found this graph to be a useful guide in positioning their work conceptually. As a result, it served as the starting point for our discussions.

### Positioning three bands on the Real Deal graph

In order to demonstrate how each of these types of authenticity are important, I take three bands that perform on the London scene and place them roughly on the Real Deal line:

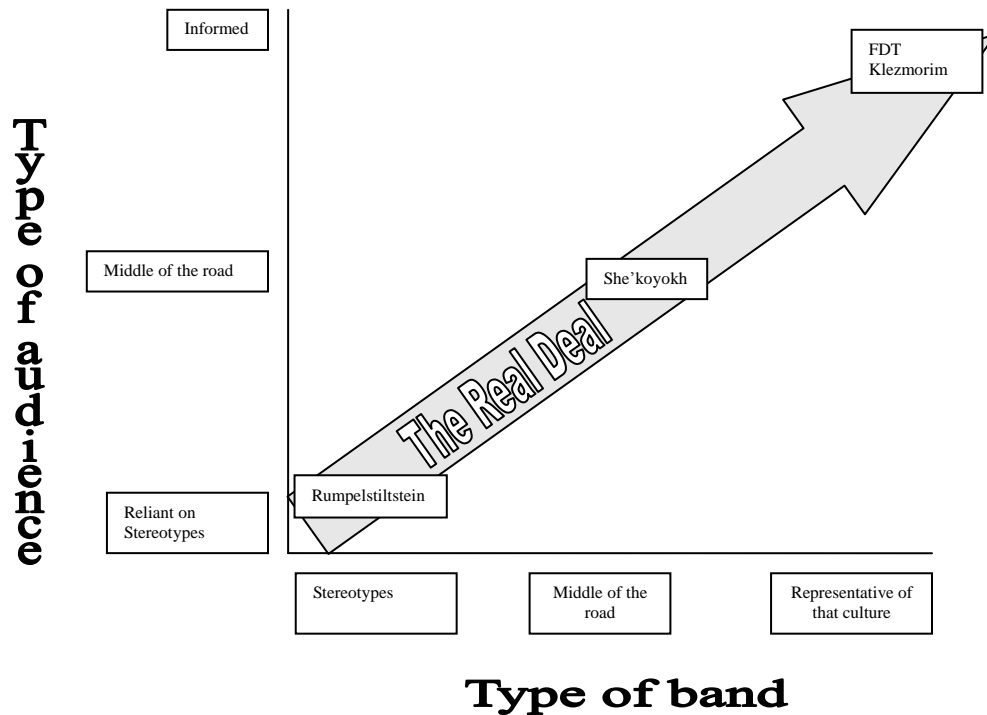


Figure 5 *The Real Deal* graph with three London bands plotted

As mentioned above, the placing of bands on this graph is subjective. I now place three bands on the graph in order to demonstrate the application of the conceptual framework I developed. As ensembles for hire on the London scene, these bands perform to a wide variety of audiences of differing degrees of knowledge and sophistication, thus potentially affecting their position on the chart.

Example 1: *Rumpelstiltstein*

*Rumpelstiltstein* is an offshoot of another band called *Rumpel Stilt's Kin*.<sup>18</sup> I was asked by the JMI to provide a band for the annual *Simcha on the Square* (2008) festival at Trafalgar Square. Due to the variety of acts that perform, the festival obviously attracts a large cross-section of the local Jewish community. There are also a large number of tourists who chance upon the event.



Figure 6 *Rumpelstiltstein* publicity shot

The costumes reflect obvious stereotypes of Jewish culture and it was suggested by the JMI that the image should suggest *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), rather than the *peyot* (ringlets), fedora hats and black attire more familiar to Londoners due to the strong presence of Hassidic Jews in areas as Stamford Hill and Golders Green. Another reference point for the wider audience might be Hollywood films such as *Yentl* (1983).

This is an interesting example of how, when asked, the JMI thinks that people might like to see ‘Jewish’ music presented to a wide audience. The programme at the Simcha on the

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<sup>18</sup> In 2011, this band merged with The Top Bananas stilt-walking band.

Square event contained a considerable variety of Jewish music from Ladino song to Israeli pop.

The instrumentation of accordion and helicon tuba gives an old world and Eastern European look. I doubt that anyone thought that stilt walking is an authentic activity in Judaism, but it certainly augments the costumes as cultural signifiers. *Rumpelstilzstein* (named by the JMI especially for the event), by using popular stereotypes, may have seemed to have an authentic image to some while being far removed from the Real Deal for others, particularly for those most informed, such as the other performers.

#### Example 2: *She'koyokh*

She'koyokh is my main focus band, as I have interviewed the majority of the members. I have already outlined the history of the band in the previous chapter.



Figure 7 *She'koyokh* publicity shot



She’koyokh performs at a range of different gigs ranging from Jewish weddings to public and corporate events. Whilst several members of the group have spent time in Eastern Europe, none speak the languages with any fluency. For some performances, the members of the band will include musicians from Eastern European countries. The band performs very regularly and admits that, whilst they are learning the music, they are passing it on to many by:

**playing, gigging, busking and touring this music around the world.** It has provided, for all of us, a window onto a whole rich musical and Jewish arena – and a window into it for so many others across the country.

(Marcovitch, in Auerbach, 2006, p.1 (Original emphasis))

By studying the music originating from Eastern Europe, they therefore aim to offer a *representation* of the Real Deal for audiences. This is also reflected in their arty and pseudo-Gypsy appearance. Perhaps many people may think that they are, in fact, from Eastern Europe and therefore *are* the Real Deal as opposed to simply representing it, a distinction I examine in more detail below. As mentioned in the above quote, busking has been an important part of this band’s development. The band has worked hard on not ‘selling out’. In a rather postmodern twist, there are elements of the band’s image that reject much of their actual white middle-class background. As Taylor puts it in another context:

Consumers... want ‘real’ gangsta rap musicians – black, poor, from the hood – not middle class ones, and certainly not white ones.

(1997, p.22)

Parallels can be drawn between the ‘real’ musicians to whom Taylor refers and Gypsies, and I explore this in later chapters. Due to their skill as instrumentalists and the classical training that their background afforded them, She’koyokh is able to move around the Real Deal line perhaps more than any other band in this study.

### Example 3: *FDT*<sup>19</sup> *Klezmorim*

FDT Klezmorim is a band led by Ilana Cravitz that possesses few, if any, regular members. Cravitz also runs a number of associated projects, including *Hopkele Productions*, which puts on community dance events as a means of ‘passing on traditional ways of dancing and playing’ (accessed online at <http://www.ilanacravitz.com/hopkele.htm> on 29 November 2011). Cravitz is interested in emphasising what she calls ‘traditional *klezmer*’ (Cravitz, 2008, p.i), the stylistic attributes of which are detailed in her 2008 book, and for which FDT Klezmorim performs the tracks on the accompanying CD.

The musicians who play in Cravitz’s bands are mostly already well-known in the Jewish community and collectively they are likely to innovate in an informed way, breaking with stereotypes that might allow the lay listener to identify the music as the Real Deal. Consequently, FDT Klezmorim and similar bands tend to manifest the Real Deal only to audiences with foreknowledge of the corresponding music and culture. It is very unusual, for instance, for any of these projects to perform *Hava Nagila* unless it is explicitly required for an event.

As the members of this type of band are less interested in playing upon cultural markers to promote their music, they are often seen wearing fairly culturally neutral clothing. In this regard, it is also notable that I was unable to find a suitable photograph for this band. If the music is often performed to people who have some understanding of the culture, the music becomes the main marker of Real Deal credentials. For example, the band may perform at Jewish Community Centres.

In the next section, I look at how authenticity has developed historically. In tracing the desire in Western society for authenticity, I examine the commercial appeal of authenticity and the role it plays in marketing music.

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<sup>19</sup> FDT = *Farshlis dayne tekhter* lit: ‘Lock up your daughters’ in Yiddish.

## **The rising importance of authenticity**

The Real Deal, as I define it above, is a type of authenticity. For all of its multiple meanings and connotations, in contemporary Western society authenticity seems to be a desirable quality to have in a musical performance. The definitions of authenticity in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) point to positive traits such as ‘authoritative’, ‘in accordance with fact’, ‘as being genuine’ or ‘as being ‘real’ (OED, *authenticity*). As Gilmore and Pine (2007) point out, businesses shy away from terms such as ‘fake’, ‘contrived’, ‘disingenuous’ or ‘phony’ (p.1). As well as often pursuing creative, technical or personal agendas, professional musicians are also running a business and, in order to be financially successful, they need to consider the expectations of the ‘customer’. In a live performance context this is invariably the audience, although this may be arbitrated by an agent, promoter or like intermediary.

Lindholm has pointed to Rousseau as ‘the inventor of authenticity’ who, in his autobiographical *Confessions* (first published in 1781), put forward that ‘revealing one’s essential nature was taken as an absolute good, even if this meant flying in the face of the moral standards of society’ (Lindholm, 2008, p.8). Lindholm concurs with Trilling (1972) and Taylor (1991) that:

authenticity... grew out of the simpler, more modest virtue of sincerity, which itself arose during the sixteenth century as a result of the gradual breakup of face-to-face feudal relationships in European society.

(Lindholm, 2008, p.3)

As people moved to larger towns and cities, they became less familiar with their neighbours, the people around them and, accordingly, the potential, as Lindholm puts it, for ‘guile and deceit’ (*ibid.*) increased. People were able, if sufficiently convincing, to hide their past and, in an increasingly class-sensitive Europe, also their social standing. As a result, personal authenticity is manifest in almost all social activities in current life.

Taylor (1991) has pointed to three ‘malaises of modernity’ (p.1) that have developed as a result of the aforementioned decline in genuineness, and he suggests that these lie at the heart of society’s desire for authenticity. The first of these ‘malaises’ is an egocentric outlook which results in people no longer having ‘a sense of purpose, of something worth dying for’ (p.4). This results in people yearning for association with something that they can relate to and identify with in the face of overwhelming focus on the individual. The second is disenchantment or fading of moral horizons<sup>20</sup> as a result of technological developments and maximum efficiency as a marker of success. The third is a feeling of helplessness as a result of established political monotony, powerless to make a significant change in matters such as the environment where, for example, it is difficult to function fully in society without a car. This, therefore, makes people yearn for a more ‘authentic’ society where they can see the direct results of their political actions. This existentialist approach is often referred to as authenticity of self, whereby an individual is true to their own being despite potential pressure from those around them. This results in the desire for authentic discourses in everyday life, which is often articulated more simply in a Real/Fake dichotomy.

When seen as an aspect of self, it could be argued that authenticity is fixed.

Is to be understood as an inherent quality of some object, person or process. Because it is inherent, it is neither negotiable nor achievable. Authenticity cannot be stripped away, nor can it be appropriated. In short, the object, person or process in question either *is* authentic or *is* not, period.

(Vannini and Williams, 2009, p.2)

In terms of ‘self authenticity’ or ‘authenticity of self’, it cannot be denied, at least to oneself, who you are and what you have done and experienced in life thus far. This seems to be what Rousseau referred to as ‘essential nature’. To what extent one can deceive oneself is difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Others constantly make assumptions about what we really are based on what they see and hear (less so by what they can touch, feel or smell). Some of these markers, such as what we say and reveal about ourselves, may be withheld or, at least, not stated. This will perhaps allow certain assumptions to be

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor, C. (1991) calls this ‘instrumental reason’.

left unchallenged and remain as truths and possibly develop further in the minds of those with whom we interact. The music that musicians play will invariably carry some meaning and association for those who hear it. As klezmer fiddler Alicia Svigals put it: ‘playing “authentically” in the sense of being true to oneself’ (in Slobin, 2002a, p.219).

### **Authenticity of self versus authenticating others**

A distinction needs to be made, therefore, between the more existential ‘authenticity of self’ and authenticating the activities of others. Does one perceive others to behave in a way that projects their authentic self? We can be reassured that our own activities are authentic by what we see others do, therefore validating through a two-way process our authenticity of self. Can we seem more authentic to others than our actual authentic self is, and can this process be manipulated for commercial gain? Cottrell makes this distinction by using the terms self-conception and individual identity:

Self-conception is essentially our view of ourselves, of how we see our own particular abilities, preferences and characteristics: a cognitive space where we decide who we really are and how we think we appear to others. Individual identity, however, is how we *do* appear to others, our individual attributes and our position in the larger social whole as it is conceived by those around us. Ultimately it is their views of us which ascribe to us our identity within a particular social or cultural group, and identity which may or may not be at variance with our own conception of our place within it, or our relationship to it; and similarly, it is our views of others which in part determine their identity within the larger group.

(2004, p.33)

The relationship between ‘self-conception’ and ‘individual identity’ is a useful starting point with regard to authenticity, as is the subtle difference between perception and conception. Whilst an individual will, as Cottrell explains, ‘self-conceive’, I argue that it is the way others *perceive* us which is an important factor in our ‘authenticity’ as a performer. The way this relates to our self-conception is central to what I am terming the Real Deal.

For Clayton (2001), as the ‘category “music” is a cultural construction rather than a natural fact, *anything which we call music is necessarily meaningful*. Any musical event is meaningful insofar as it offers affordances to an individual: it may offer multiple affordances to each individual simultaneously, and it offers a more or less different set of affordances to each individual’ (p.9). It would seem to be the case that meaning is an important element in performance, at least to those participating in the scene in question. It is evidently desirable that this meaning is perceived to be ‘authentic’ and presented by musicians who are believed to genuinely represent the meaning by meeting certain expectations of an audience. There may be as many interpretations of the meaning of a performance and its supposed authenticity as there are audience members, and this may fluctuate throughout the performance. This is one of the reasons why conducting audience-based research is fraught with problems. The collective experience of listening to music may well shape some of these interpretations. An example of this is collective applause, which may affirm and validate the actions of the performer for individuals. However, it is the performers who are most likely to guide the audience into any conclusions about their authenticity. Tailoring a performance to cater for these expectations of authenticity reflects an increasing trend in consumer culture where we are encouraged to buy ‘authentic’ products.

As Moore has noted, there is a longstanding debate concerning the enigmatic question of whether the persona that an audience sees on stage is a true reflection of how they actually are, in terms of the performer’s authenticity of self (see Moore, 2002). Clearly, if the audience is not intimate with the performer, they have no choice but to make assumptions about the performer’s authenticity based on what they feel they know. These preconceptions may be taken from any number of sources, but mass media are clearly a strong influence in forming stereotypes. This is particularly true with regard to cultural stereotypes, and businesses play upon these in order to cultivate an authentic image. It is important for audiences, as consumers, to feel that they are getting the Real Deal.

For those musicians who not projecting their own authentic self, this raises questions about representation. From my fieldwork, it became clear that musicians do aspire to

verisimilitude in their reproductions. Consequently, this becomes an ontological problem with regard to representation: to what extent does a representation participate in that which it represents? I argue that, as a result of a desire for the Real Deal, these representations and negotiations of authenticity play a central role in shaping the scene.

In terms of fieldwork, establishing what audiences might expect or think of a given performance or performer is difficult, if not impossible, to know for sure. As I have mentioned, even if it were possible to interview each audience member at every performance, the varying backgrounds and differing experiences would be vast,<sup>21</sup> thus making it difficult to arrive at meaningful conclusions. There may be some ambiguity in the minds of individual audience members as to just how ‘authentic’ a performance may be taken to be. Perceptions of musicians and their Real Deal ‘credentials’, whether intentional or otherwise, are manifest in a plethora of activities that relate to and complement live performance such as promotional material, audio and video recordings and even word-of-mouth recommendations. It would seem, therefore, that the degree to which some conception of the ‘authentic’ may be projected onto a musician’s work is an important part of the professional success.

### **Real Deal credentials**

I argue that being perceived as the Real Deal contributes to success, on a number of levels, on the larger World Music scene in London. Consequently, capitalising on aspects of oneself that may be viewed as authentic is particularly advantageous. A working understanding of the importance of authenticity is likely to augment what Cottrell has called ‘musical capital’ (2004, p.66), which may have a correlation with financial gain.

Lindholm (2008) suggests there are ‘two overlapping modes for characterizing any entity as authentic; genealogical or historical (*origin*) and identity or correspondence (*content*)’

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<sup>21</sup> Although Brittin (1996) has attempted to assess preference for music of certain cultures.

(p.2). Although both are central to a conception of the Real Deal, they are not always compatible and both are fully negotiable, as I demonstrate.

Both Moore (2002) and Taylor (1997) have examined those aspects of authenticity, which seem to contribute to success in Popular and World Music respectively. Although there is considerable and inevitable overlap between definitions, I endeavour to group them together. The issues were all raised in my fieldwork and seem to be endemic and representative of the working practices of London klezmer musicians.

The first is the importance that is placed upon where a musician is from. There is commercial appeal in the exotic for an audience keen to experience something culturally new, which can be represented in a musical performance. Taylor points to the tendency of 'Western' audiences to afford non-Western music one subject position. As I explore below, stereotyping is inevitable and rife. However, on another level, this oversimplification on the part of audiences gives musicians a licence to manipulate perceptions. If, in the case of klezmer, the music comes from a constructed 'location', the nineteenth-century shtetl, considerable liberties can be taken. If a musician can make a claim on being 'from' somewhere that is related to the music, then this would seem to be advantageous. In the case of klezmer, this can be very broad and encompasses Eastern Europe, Israeli and even the Jewish community in London, whereby the geographical link is by heritage.

It would appear to be important and desirable for a Real Deal musician to perform on an instrument that embodies, or is compatible with, the culture that they represent. Consequently, the violin - or, more correctly, fiddle - has a prominent role in klezmer. Any attempt to perform on another instrument, which may be a more modern instrument, would necessitate some arrangement which may be viewed as technological mediation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Silverman (2007) has noted how the band of the Balkan singer Esma Redžepova 'was met with hostile reactions, even booing in Spain because they used a synthesizer, perceived as a non-traditional, modern intrusion' (p.344). She mentions how this was a particular problem at WOMEX.



The more exotic and unfamiliar the instrument may be to the audience, the greater the commercial appeal.

This is related to what Taylor calls *authenticity as emotionality*. Are musicians perceived to stand for, in a genuine or honest way, what they represent? In a similar manner, if the audience does not know what is being represented or interpret it in their own way, then the musicians' Real Deal credentials may be seen as being stronger. This is also linked to *authenticity as primality* because, if a musician is perceived as performing in an unmediated and honest manner, the audience will feel that they are hearing the music as it always has been performed. The phrase 'time honoured tradition' is particularly pertinent here and it is here that *historical* authenticity (Kivy, 1995, p.7) is appropriate. Naturally, there needs to be a sense that the musician has experience of the culture they are representing.

In order to be seen as the Real Deal, it is desirable for musicians to perform music that they can claim ownership of with a non-financial motive. It is, therefore, important not to be viewed as 'selling out' and bowing to consumer pressures, whatever they might be. As previously mentioned, there are a number of contradictions here within a consumer culture context in which World Music is situated: being viewed as the Real Deal has the potential to generate money. Musicians performing on the street, for instance, may be seen to have valid Real Deal credentials as there is no mediation in terms of venue, promoter or even means of amplification.

It is important that the clothes the musicians wear are seen to be their own choice and uniformity may reduce Real Deal credentials. Similarly, the movements a musician makes are to be seen as spontaneous and unrehearsed. If one is performing music that is from one's own culture, rehearsal and sheet music would not be required as familiarity with the material is a given. Those musicians who succeed in convincing an audience that they are not *selling out* are, by definition, *keeping it real* and are, therefore, viewed as the Real Deal.

## Selling authenticity

A distinction needs to be made between the authentic *experience* and the authentic *product*. Sometimes, an authentic experience can be packaged and sold as a product, such as tourism (see Knudsen and Waade, 2010; Wang, 1999, p.352). The Early Music movement of recent decades has foregrounded the debate surrounding authenticity, not least because this proved popular with audiences.<sup>23</sup> If one is to view the musical ‘work’ as a product, this is immediately problematic. How can we strive for an authentic and definitive ‘product’ if there are several versions of the work? What represents the authentic or even definitive version of the work and for whom? Although these complex issues fall outside the scope of this study,<sup>24</sup> it is clear that, whatever ‘the work’ is understood to be, there is likely to be a certain amount of subjectivity.

The issues surrounding this debate and their impact on performance in Western Art Music have been comprehensively articulated by Taruskin (1996), Kenyon (1988) and, with particular attention to the wider meanings of authenticity, Davies (2003). Subscribers to this movement strive to recreate music, which mostly predates audio recordings, as ‘faithful to the composer’s intentions’ (Kivy, 1999, p.9) as possible, whatever they might be understood to be. As with any historical study, these understandings may differ greatly. As Kenyon, quoting Ranke, puts it ‘*wie es eigentlich gewesen* – simply to show how it really was’ (1988, p.13). As noted above, Taylor (1997) calls this ‘authenticity as primality’. Such performances often recreate the original instrumentation with meticulous attention to detail. It would seem that a large part of the appeal and charm for all concerned is attempting to recreate the music, through historical research, as the composer might have heard it. This often foregoes advances in technology, such as brass instruments with valves that composers doubtless would have utilised if available. Indeed, certain instruments not commonly used today may add to the exotic nature of the performance. Importantly, the intention for many is to *experience* the music as the composer originally intended. As Tomlinson remarks:

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<sup>23</sup> Although the term ‘authentic’ was dropped in favour of ‘historically informed performance’ in the 1990s (Fabian, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> For a comprehensive study of the musical work, see Goehr (2007).

Our interest in creating authentic sounds of music can be justified only by our belief that they lead us closer to its authentic meanings. But what is the nature of these meanings?

(1988, p.115)

This is a problematic statement. However, with ontological ambiguity concerning the musical ‘work’, issues of meaning are foregrounded. He goes on to make several analogies that are pertinent to this current study. The first is that the meaning, whatever it might constitute, is a personal construction: it is as *authentic* as we want it to be (p.117). This, rather crucially, moves the search for *authentic* meaning away from what he calls ‘the snare’ (*loc.cit.*) of objectivity. Of course, we can often only make educated and relatively subjective guesses as to what the composer’s intentions were and any meaning that such intentions were to convey. This assumes that there were any elements that exceeded the practical functionality of producing music for a particular event:

All meanings, authentic or not, arise from the personal ways in which individuals, performers and audience, incorporate the work in their own signifying contexts. Clearly the performer can exert only so much influence on the personal context of the listener.

(*ibid.*, p.123)

The fact is that the authentic ‘product’ forms only a part of the overall authentic ‘experience’ and it is this consumer experience that has become so important in Western society.

In their book *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (1999), Gilmore and Pine proposed that most experiences are now commoditised and go on in a later book to suggest that ‘it seems no part of life hasn’t been touched by this shift to commercialized experiences’ (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p.11). Immediately, this can apply to the Early Music concerts mentioned above. Authenticity is a selling point and this could not be articulated more clearly than by Kinder (2007) in *fRoots* magazine:

We construct meaning and authenticity from sound. It's authenticity which sells, whether it's local music recorded in the field (generally considered to be favoured by an older audience), or a hybrid created with an 'honest' artistic intention (i.e. not simply made to jump on a bandwagon and make money in an attempt to appeal to a younger audience.

(Kinder, 2007, p.49)

The title of Gilmore and Pine's follow-up book is self-explanatory and echoes Kinder: *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (2007). Much of the content of this book, in terms of consumer culture, is particularly applicable to music and highlights audiences', as consumers, desire for something authentic. These attitudes are illustrated in Wald's (2007) interview with Márta Sebestyén, the lead singer of Hungarian folk group Muzsikás:

It sounded like heart music, right from the heart. In this age – I call it the Coca-Cola age – when everything is artificial, it's very rare to find such pure things. Now people are realizing that pure cotton and pure this and that is the most important thing, when this world is fading. And this music is as important for me as clear air or water.

(p.155)

By presenting this viewpoint, Sebestyén is reinforcing her own preference for authenticity to reinforce the 'purity' of her music. In an interesting twist, one piece that features on the Muzsikás album *The Lost Music of Transylvania* is 'Szászrégeni zsidó tánc' (lit: Jewish Dance From Szászrégen).<sup>25</sup> This melody is instantly recognisable as the Yiddish song *Belz Mayn Shtetle Belz* (lit: Belz, my little shtetl Belz), which is not a folk song but a composed piece by Yiddish cabaret composer Alexander Olshanetsky. Popular in early twentieth-century New York, the song was clearly intended to evoke feelings of the old country for recent Jewish immigrants. However, although the song may have found its way back to Eastern Europe, its authenticity as a folk song is highly questionable. The fact is the music is marketed as being 'lost' folk music and the majority of consumers are happy with this, and whether it actually is or not is less important.

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<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this album, see Nurse (1993).

As can be seen from Sebestyén's quote, several parallels can be drawn from other areas of business, particularly those that offer 'authentic' and 'real' services. Coca-Cola is presented by Sebestyén as the antithesis of all that is authentic and real. Coca-Cola, perhaps to combat the concerns of consumers and people just like Sebestyén, had a famous campaign in the early 1970s to promote 'The Real Thing',<sup>26</sup> complete with 'retro' artwork:

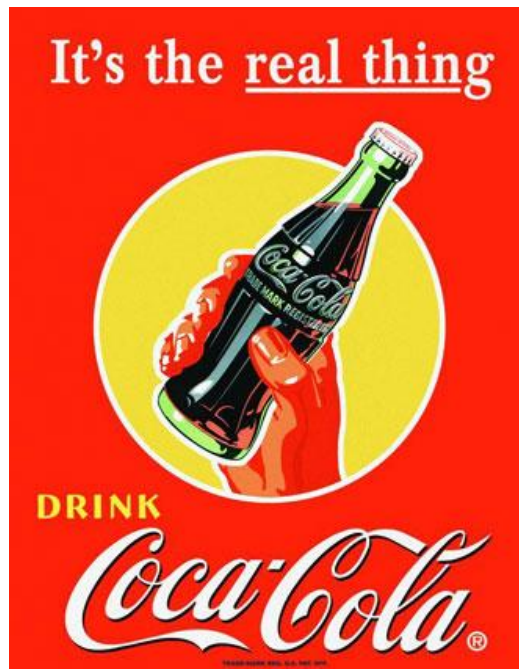


Figure 8 *Coca-Cola: It's the Real Thing. 1970s ad campaign*

This advertising campaign was reintroduced in 2003 as 'Coca-Cola... Real' that 'reflects genuine, authentic moments in life and the natural role that Coca-Cola plays in them'.<sup>27</sup> Of course, Coca-Cola is 'real' in terms of its actual existence; this is simply asserting authenticity against several rival brands through mass advertising. Coca-Cola has often been copied and this advertising campaign asserts its place in the market. Chris Lowe, chief marketing officer at Coca-Cola North America at the time, articulated as follows:

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<sup>26</sup> Launched in 1969.

<sup>27</sup> From Coca-Cola's press release. Accessed online [http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/pdf/cokelore/Heritage\\_CokeLore\\_slogans.pdf](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/pdf/cokelore/Heritage_CokeLore_slogans.pdf) on 7 January 2009.

Authenticity, originality and 'real' refreshment are part of our heritage, and what the brand has always stood for... These are values that consumers associate more strongly with Coca-Cola than any other brand.

(*Coke gets 'Real' with new marketing campaign*. 10 January 2003. Accessed online <http://www.beveragedaily.com/Products/Coke-gets-Real-with-new-marketing-campaign> 7 January 2009)

The link here between the drink as a 'product' and also as 'part of our heritage' is significant. The emphasis is on experiencing the drink within the context of a collective heritage, though quite what broad heritage Lowe is referring to is unclear. Nonetheless, heritage is presented as something quite desirable here.

As the drink became more successful, there was expansion and a subsequent loss of authenticity as mass production lessened the personal touch. Large multinational companies, such as McDonalds (see Walsh, 2006; Breen, 2007) and Coca Cola appear to be struggling to maintain their authentic credibility, and their advertising campaigns work to combat this. Crofts (2003) devotes a whole chapter<sup>28</sup> of his book to such ventures, such as 'Innocent' smoothies and 'Organic Express', where he stresses that 'the really big advantage to running a highly ethical, value-driven business is that the work has meaning and value in a wider context than just something to do' (*ibid.*, p.101). However, particularly in the manufacturing examples that Crofts gives,<sup>29</sup> we are simply presented with products and, whilst the people behind the products *may* subscribe to the presented ethos, we have no way of validating that they are telling the truth and not just projecting authenticity purely for financial gain. This perceived transparency is more marked in industries where there is a direct, personal contact with the consumer and this includes musical performance. With restaurants, for example, the consumer experience of interacting with what is perceived to be an authentic waiter may be an important part of the appeal. In a Turkish restaurant, for example, one may expect the waiters to be Turkish to complement the overall experience that is likely to be mirrored in the décor, but also to convey confidence that the food will be 'authentic'. Again, the focus is on the authentic experience which validates the products - in this case, food.

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<sup>28</sup> Chapter Four 'Those who are already doing it' pp.97-122.

<sup>29</sup> See also Breen (2007) and Boyle (2003) for many more examples.



Figure 9 *The Dervish Café, Stoke Newington, London*

The question of whether the waiters really eat the same food that they are serving at home, and if they are even Turkish, may not be discerned by the customer, so long as they look and sound like the customer expects.<sup>30</sup> The waiter may be inauthentic, or fake (in terms of self-authenticity), but he may be seen as sufficiently authentic to meet the expectations of the majority of customers, who have to some extent been targeted. What Breen (2007) called the ‘authentic paradox: a brand doesn't feel real when it overtly tries to make itself real’ would seem to be resolved in how the expectations of the customer are met.

This interplay between what is perceived to be authentic/real and what isn't can be complex. However, there are examples where a customer may understand why he is being lied to. A Turkish resident of Stoke Newington turning up at the Dervish restaurant in Figure 9 is likely to understand the economic reasons for playing upon certain Turkish stereotypes and is likely to see beyond them. This example demonstrates a ‘fake-real’ situation. There is an understanding why stereotypes are used, even though they might not present their authentic self.

<sup>30</sup> See Eco (1986, pp.43-44) for a similar discussion about a Polynesian restaurant.

Gilmore and Pine advocate, together with Crofts (2003) and Boyle (2003), that a truly, perhaps universally, ‘authentic’ business will be one that is ‘real-real’. Various pressures may force a business to rely on fake elements, such as labour shortage of ‘authentic’ workers. However, identifying whether the service is ‘real-fake’ or ‘fake-fake’ may be difficult for the consumer to discern, perhaps to the advantage of the company and also, it could be argued, the consumer’s experience. The significance of this with regard to music would seem to be important.

The following placard, outside ‘The Real Greek Restaurant’<sup>31</sup> on Paddington Street in London, advertises the ‘experience’ of ‘real’ food that is ‘really’ Greek:



Figure 10 *The Real Greek restaurant, Paddington Street, London*

The first thing to question is, can there be food that isn’t ‘real’? Whilst it would seem that ‘authentic’ might be a more apt word, this does highlight the relative common usage and

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<sup>31</sup> The Real Greek is a chain of restaurants.



interchangeability of ‘real’ and ‘authentic’. I speculate that, if live music were to accompany the meal, the assumption would be that it be performed by ‘real’ Greek musicians performing ‘real’ Greek music on ‘real’ Greek instruments to complement the ‘experience’ that they are offering.<sup>32</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1988) has used the example of advertising in tourism to show how a ‘representation’ (p.63) of culture might seem authentic by meeting expectations or expectations that have been promoted and encouraged by commercial forces.<sup>33</sup> In an advertisement for British Airways Safaricenter International, ‘bills Africa as “the land of *your* greatest imagination” (emphasis added), which is to say, the land of the tourist’s representations’ (*ibid.*). Are similar forces not in effect within music and are musicians and their performances as authentic and real as we want, believe or want to believe they are?

In something of a postmodern twist, ‘authenticity’ may be manifest in the least likely of places. For instance, is it possible to have (and revel in) an authentic, inauthentic experience? In the words of Eco, in his essay *Travels in Hyperreality*: ‘the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake’. (Eco, 1986, p.8). Gilmore and Pine use the word ‘retronym’ to qualify a noun with adjectives where one was previously not needed, such as ‘acoustic guitar’, ‘live performance’, ‘scripted TV’ and ‘real life’<sup>34</sup> (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p.14). It appears, therefore, that anything can be seen as authentic or more ‘real’ than something else we have experienced. Not only can this be the performer, but also the performance; it is possible to have a perceived ‘authentic’ performer give an inauthentic performance. Perhaps it would have to be perceived as being under duress, and I doubt a performer who is seen as inauthentic could be seen to give an authentic performance. Venue, location and a plethora of other factors can also be validated using this same process.

Gilmore and Pine point to technological developments as the obvious and logical reason for such terms as authentic and real being commonplace, and this is certainly a significant

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<sup>32</sup> On 22 October 2011, one of my fellow PhD students, vocalist Spyridon Antonopoulos, gave such a performance with Pavlos Melas (guitar and vocals) and Pavlos Carvalho (bouzouki) performing Rebetiko music at one of the Real Greek restaurants under the name of *Plastikes Karekles* (lit: Plastic Chairs).

<sup>33</sup> See also Knudsen and Waade (2010).

<sup>34</sup> ‘Real’ Coca-Cola is another well-known example of this.

factor. This seems to have played a part in Coca-Cola's need to assert the 'real' quality of the product after mass production. Certainly, Walter Benjamin (in 1936) pointed to a loss of authenticity through reproduction (see Caygill, 1998 for further discussion). However, there is a wider issue of mediation that is related to technology or perceived lack of it. Acoustic and live suggest intimacy and a more personal experience. The fact is that much recorded music *is* edited note by note and autotuned. The success that MTV enjoyed with the 'Unplugged' series in the 1990s is a testament to this, despite the fact that the acoustic element was only superficial (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.5). Perhaps, as in the hypothetical case in the Turkish restaurant, the audience/customer is content with such a situation? How many people can tell the difference between an acoustic guitar that is amplified with a microphone (technically 'unplugged') or with an acoustic guitar with an under saddle pickup, which would require it to be directly 'plugged in'?

As with the industry examples cited above, it would seem that the less the audience knows about the processes involved in commodification, the better. Connell and Gibson (2003) remark that 'for most commodities, visible linkages between a product's marketed image and the realities of its production method (and the labour, environmental and cultural politics that go with this) are discouraged, lest consumers discover any unethical aspect of the commodity's creation' (p.28). Of course, another irony here in that, for all the spirit of openness and transparency (of expression at least), members of an audience are less interested in the mechanics of how the music/performance has been carefully marketed. This goes some way to explain the marketing effectiveness of a 'jam'; however carefully produced it might be, the illusion of spontaneity is a desirable one.<sup>35</sup>

Connell and Gibson also consider perceptions of authenticity in what they term 'traditional music' to be shaped *as a result* of the commodification of the music. In order for the music to be sold, the music needs to be packaged as a version that can be sold as a product. This 'fixity', as Connell and Gibson call it, means the music is bound up as a product, such as a CD, that has artwork and attachment to performers. This type of authenticity, in common with the Real Deal:

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<sup>35</sup> See 'Gypsy Jazz Jam Session, QuecumBar, London' in *The Independent*. 6 January 2006.

is in part constructed by attempts to embed music in place. This occurs in a number of ways: through ethnomusicological practice, in various mobilizations of tradition, in discursive constructions of place by songwriters and in the way that audiences receive music. Fixity is thus complex – no one theory could examine all the permutations of the links between music and place.

(Connell and Gibson, 2003, p.19)

Though complex, this may go some way to explaining why the musicians on this scene start with music that is more established as the ‘fixity’ is more defined and established; therefore, it is understood and accepted by a wider audience. There is a point of reference for its authenticity, should it be questioned. It is also perhaps easier to locate and learn for musicians as it has been packaged, marketed and disseminated. I discuss below the importance of who is responsible for these processes.

In an interesting twist to Walter Benjamin’s claim that reproduction enhances our desire for the authentic, the production of CDs gives musicians a convenient point of reference as to what the authentic might sound like. For Cottrell, CDs ‘increasingly function as both icons of and symbols for internalized ideas of group identity’ (2004, p.97). With reference to the ‘work’ concept, this points to certain exemplar recordings as ‘authentic’ works that are to be revered. Certainly, the purchase of CDs or downloading music from the internet is the easiest way to expose oneself to new musical genres. Klezmer, for example, has an interesting blend of historical reassurance and stylistic ambiguity as a result of scant early source material. This, therefore, makes it easier for musicians to validate their performances as authentic; as the primary sources are so few, considerable guesswork is required to perform some of the music. As I detail in later chapters, those responsible for putting these CDs out there and, perhaps inadvertently, claiming them to be the authentic Real Deal, are empowered by this process and hold a position of some responsibility. Quite possibly, the record producers market the music as authentic because they feel the music fits with intended consumers’ perception of what the Real Deal might be. Quite how ‘authentically’ a CD might represent early twentieth-century Eastern European Jewish music is often difficult to tell. Yet, this is a dilemma faced by any historian trying to piece together a projection of how things might have been. The

Muzsikás album *The Lost Music of Transylvania* demonstrates how it is relatively easy to ‘sell’ history to suit one’s own artistic agenda.

## **World Music**

World music is that music we encounter, well, everywhere in the world. World music can be folk music, art music, or popular music; its practitioners may be amateur or professional. World music may be sacred, secular, or commercial; its performers may emphasize authenticity, while at the same time relying heavily on mediation to disseminate it to as many markets as possible. ... There is ample justification to call just about anything world music.

(Bohlman, 2002, p.i)

Bohlman’s definition in the preface to *World Music: A Very Short Introduction* (2002) could, by definition, apply to any style of music. The first thing to consider is: World Music according to whom? In the case of London, this has developed in a very particular way.

World Music, as most consumers experience it today, particularly in London, grew out of a carefully considered marketing campaign in the late 1980s. Whilst some of the styles within it have been around a good deal longer, the way it is packaged and presented to us is mediated, although consumers are encouraged to view the whole process as much more authentic and real. It is perhaps best articulated via an extract from *fRoots* magazine, formerly *Folk Roots*, whose editor, Ian Anderson, and contributors have done much over the years to shape consumer perceptions of the music that they have promoted and introduced to the market:

Suddenly this marketing ploy, now musical category though not musical type, is 20 years old. It’s arguably not a genre at all because it has such a wide embrace, and this is a problem for some. But we’re used to wide-ranging terms (jazz, for example), so it matters little that ‘world music’ does not spring from a musical form, that it is, as Joe Boyd states, ‘basically music from outside the communities that command the heights of the economy’. Charlie Gillett adds: ‘It’s generally not in English. When we first looked for a box to put everything in, it was mostly records that had been made for a local market, but which happened to be attractive to those of us outside of those countries, whether it was Bulgaria,

Nigeria or Brazil.’ It includes local traditional music from all over the world as well as hybrids and fusion and music from countries where it is made with Western production values and glossy studio techniques – and therein lies the rub. (Kinder, 2007, p.48)

World Music was, therefore, invented as a category to sell music.<sup>36</sup> This has also been well-documented by Frith (2000), who adds:

World music wasn’t a sales category like any other; these record labels claimed a particular kind of engagement with the music they traded and promised a particular kind of experience to their consumers. (p. 306)

This experience ties in with the ‘authentic experience’ as detailed by Gilmore and Pine (2007) and others. Again, there is a strong focus on the experience that listening to such music will generate. As Negus (2002) points out, as this is more than just ‘manufactured’ (p.129) authenticity, it is also a ‘concept and a sentiment, a feeling which connects the “fabrications” of the industry with the lived realities of fans and artists’ (*ibid.*). Feld puts forward similar reservations about such commercialization and commodification:

Witnessing and chronicling these stories has produced a new discourse on authenticity, a discourse forged out of narratives equally anxious and celebratory about the world--and the music--of world music. Anxious narratives sometimes start from the suspicion that capitalist concentration and competition in the recording industry is always productive of a lesser artistry, a more commercial, diluted, and sellable version of a world once more ‘pure’, ‘real’, or less commodified. This suspicion fuels a kind of policing of the locations of musical authenticity and traditions. It questions whether world music does more to incite or erase musical diversity, asking why and how musical loss is countered by the proliferation of new musics. (Feld, 2000, p.152)

Maybe these are the issues that make people suspicious of music they hear and, therefore, encourage them to desire authenticity and musicians who are not touched by this commercial ‘policing’. Of course, sampling is an example of how sounds can be manipulated to make the authenticity of the music seem more ambiguous, which may

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<sup>36</sup> Grey (2009) dedicated a chapter to what she calls ‘inventing world music’ pp.13-34.

create confusion or a false sense of identification with audiences. This is akin to the postmodern view taken by Chanan, following on from Walter Benjamin, for whom 'reproduction makes *all* music equally worn out and done to death; on the other [hand], with the multiplication of media and the means of replication, the mechanism of the market has itself created a condition in which all music circulates more and more freely beyond its control' (1995, p.151). As record producer, Joe Boyd wrote about WOMAD in *The Guardian*:

the world music audience wants not slick production using the latest gadgets, but authenticity, spontaneity and virtuosity, recorded like a classic Blue Note jazz LP.  
(Boyd, 2008)

The fact that the music is 'generally not in English' (*ibid.*) suggests that the listeners may not understand what the song is about. This, often blissful, ignorance can give rise to much confusion about the music. An example of this was when I heard musicians<sup>37</sup> (with some experience of playing Balkan music) talk about the song *Ederlezi*, made popular by Goran Bregović, as being about the Lord of the Rings character *Saruman*, when the lyrics are, in fact, *Sa o Roma*.<sup>38</sup> They were joking about it, but it illustrates the point that musicians may have little comprehension about the meaning of the lyrics. Taylor (2000) has also pointed this out with regard to Irish singer Enya, whose Irish (Celtic) language is 'To most listeners... a completely unknown language and might as well be nonsense syllables' (p.164). This does not only apply to English. Perhaps the archetypal Jewish song *Hava Nagila* (lit: Let us rejoice) is often thought to be in Yiddish, perhaps due to the klezmer feel of the music,<sup>39</sup> although it is normally sung in Hebrew.

It could be argued that there are many 'World Musics', depending on who is producing the records. For example, there are no defining criteria for a band to be showcased at the World Music expo,<sup>40</sup> WOMEX. There is a panel that may have a broad idea what they

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<sup>37</sup> Whilst on a Ska/pop gig in Kalinigrad with Sam Ritchie, 28 October 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Lit: 'All the Roma' in Romani.

<sup>39</sup> Although the perfect cadence at the end does much to remove the modality of the piece and places it more clearly in the minor, it is one reason why many klezmer musicians reject this piece as part of their repertory.

<sup>40</sup> This was revealed to me by one of the organisers.

are looking for, perhaps based on previous commercial ventures. Due to the commercial interests of World Music, it is useful to view it as a branch of popular music. It is, therefore, disposed to many of the notions of authenticity that have been part of popular music discourse for decades.

Terms such as ‘keeping it real’, ‘staying true’ and ‘getting back to your roots’ are often associated with pop music and this side to authenticity has received considerable academic attention over the last decade. World Music is, for many, simply a type of pop music and so it is unsurprising that many of Moore’s (2002) observations of rock music ring true for World Music, too. Pointing to two important studies, Moore highlights a rock singer’s role in cultural representation:

There are, however, various authenticities, sharing a base assumption about ‘essential(ized), real, actual, essence’ (Taylor, 1997, p.21): they are concisely described in Gilbert and Pearson’s identification of the requirements of 1980s ‘authentic’ rock, wherein artists must speak the truth of their (and others’) situations. Authenticity was guaranteed by the presence of a specific type of instrumentation... [the singer’s] fundamental role was to *represent* the culture from which he comes. (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, pp.164-5)

(2002, p.209)

It can be assumed that musicians aim to present a performance that represents, in as truthful a manner as possible, the culture that they embody. This may be regardless of their actual cultural position and may even contradict their own convictions. An historical example of this can be seen in the performing attire and repertoire of blues singer Leadbelly who, at the insistence of manager John Lomax, wore prison attire for theatre gigs despite being a free man (Barker and Taylor, p.12). This must have been to project ‘authenticity’ appeal to a largely white audience, validating the blues music that was being performed. By the late 1960s, Johnny Cash had sung at Folsom Prison about time served there, despite the fact he had not, therefore validating his ‘authenticity’ to his fans. Cash, performing to a non-paying audience at the prison, must have seemed altruistic, not least to his legions of fans. The commercial gains reaped by Cash, however, whose career had been dwindling, were clearly worth the gesture. The concert and subsequent album, 40 years after the event, are noted for their ‘authenticity’:

Cash biographer Michael Streissguth [writes] 'While other musicians gave lip service to those on the fringes of society, Cash met the disenfranchised on their own turf and rolled tape.' Bestor Cram, producer of the box set's DVD, adds, 'There is the vulnerable heart of a desperate man revealed with passion and intensity. It's so authentic that you feel he can touch you.'

(Lozaw, 2009. Accessed online [http://www.boston.com/ae/music/articles/2009/01/04/still\\_essential\\_after\\_40\\_years/?page=1](http://www.boston.com/ae/music/articles/2009/01/04/still_essential_after_40_years/?page=1) 7 January 2009).

There is a contradiction here: an authentic performance, it would seem, ought not to be seen as being for financial gain, as the reason for the performance should be perceived as sincere and being of personal importance (see Connell and Gibson, 2003, p.29). However, audiences are clearly interested in seeing such performances and are willing to pay to see them. I suggest that the musicians who are perceived as the Real Deal can, and often end up being seen as, commercially authentic or authentic for commercial ends. Middleton (1990) has gone so far as to suggest that a World Music musician must be perceived as being 'honest' as well as 'authentic'; that is, sincere to an audience. Moore picks up on this:

For Richard Middleton, any approach to music which aims to contextualise it as cultural expression must foreground discussion of 'authenticity', since 'honesty (truth to cultural experience) becomes the validating criterion of musical value' (Middleton, 1990, p.127).

(2002, p.212)

For a musician to be perceived as being the Real Deal, the music should be contextualised (or perceived to be contextualised) as a true reflection of their 'cultural expression' (*loc.cit*). It also seems to be important that these expressions be heartfelt, sincere and compatible with their authentic self.

In terms of sincerity in performance, Taylor (2000) has discussed the prevalence of World Music (which he terms to be 'nonwestern music' (p.162)) in television advertising. As the main purpose of most advertising is to sell something, the type of music used is particularly telling. Not only is the music often generic and non-specific, using drums and



end-blown flutes, but it may even use a 'fake language' (p.163). This music, by its lack of cultural and geographical specificity has, we can assume, more universal appeal. The broader the target audience, the more stereotypical the music seems to be. This is similar to World Music performance practices, where musicians are ultimately trying to 'sell' their performance to the audience, and large company advertising that uses World Music to sell products and services (perhaps not culture-specific experiences such as holidays). Taylor suggests that the type of generic World Music used in television adverts plays upon people's ignorance of specific cultures by making it accessible to anyone by symbolising 'real', or 'pseudo-real', experience and knowledge:

It is important to point out here, however, that the kinds of knowledge of particular places on the planet are highly specific, localized, and instrumental; they are 'real' knowledges, distinct from what I am calling *global information capital*, in that it symbolizes a broad knowledge of an experience of the world but isn't actually knowledge itself.

(Taylor, 2000, p.178)

Of course, most people will likely be aware of their own ignorance and, in striving for the most 'real' experience possible, will rely upon those musicians who are deemed most authentic (with 'real' knowledge and from a particular place) to provide it for them. As Gilroy (1991) highlights:

It has taken on greater proportions as original, folk, or local expressions of black culture were identified as authentic and positively evaluated for that reason, while subsequent hemispheric or global manifestations of the same cultural forms got dismissed as inauthentic and therefore lacking in cultural or aesthetic value precisely because of their distance (supposed or actual) from a readily identifiable point of origin.

(p.122)

There is, therefore, likely to be authentic 'value', for an audience at least, in performing music from the country that you are identified as coming from. Whilst there are inevitably many different types of audiences, as in any type of marketing and advertising, the broadest approach possible is taken here in order to maximise income.

## Positioning klezmer in World Music

Bohlman (2002) offers the following definition of klezmer in a World Music context:

Jewish popular music, historically associated with the rituals and dances of weddings in the Yiddish-speaking communities of Eastern Europe and North America. Klezmer has entered a diaspora of its own that historicizes the world of European Jewry destroyed by the Holocaust.

(p.127)

The fact that much of the music that Eastern European Jews brought to America lost popularity when big bands and Latin music became popular around the 1930s has allowed for considerable invention in the revival of this music, which started around the 1970s. As discussed below, there is scant evidence of what nineteenth-century Jewish wedding music might have sounded like. The Yiddish word 'klezmer' originally referred to the musician. The music which became known as klezmer, only as part of the revival, fitted well into the World Music marketing category. Not only did it come from a far away 'place' geographically, namely Eastern Europe, the varying constructions of the *shtetl* also came from the past. The market was clearly there for Jews, who wanted to listen to music that put them in touch with their 'roots', and it developed into a style that was accessible to all.

As klezmer is a relatively modern, culturally constructed style/genre, this makes it as easy to find holes in its 'authenticity' as it is for World Music producers to market it as 'authentic'. Klezmer is a Jewish music style and, as Bard-Rosenberg has commented, in many ways it can be viewed as a projection of Jewishness that is largely free from connotations of repression:

The Holocaust in particular further problematised what it meant to be Jewish (if it were not a problematic enough identity already), and cultural formations such as klezmer put us in danger of describing Jewishness only in reference to the history of oppression; the rift in the constructed ideal, and thus imply an inherent inauthenticity in contemporary Jewish identity.

(2008, p.24)

This underlying ‘inauthenticity’ that exists within klezmer makes for some interesting tensions when Jewish klezmer musicians have to deal with broader projections of Jewishness, such as The Holocaust and the State of Israel. Silverman (2007) shows how:

according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has discursive recourse to the past (1998). She shows how authenticity oscillates between the concealment and discovery of the marginal or authentic. Oppression, then, may confer authenticity, as the following advertisement narrates: ‘Whirling wedding dances. Flamboyant fiddle and cimbalom music. Passionate lamentations born of centuries of persecution... The Roma have kept alive their history, tradition and religions solely through oral and musical communication’. (Dartmouth University concert advertisement, 1999)  
(p.347)

Consequently these issues have the potential to aggravate cultural sensitivities. This seems to be the case with regard to a style such as klezmer, which is often referred to as a ‘heritage’ music (see Slobin, 2000a, pp.11-35). This may be particularly true with regard to genealogy, where one’s ‘roots’ may be an important factor in how people perceive various aspects of authentic performance. As discussed in Chapter Three, aspects of genealogy are extremely problematic in themselves, not least from the complex and largely unconstructive issues surrounding race.

This potential to ‘annoy’<sup>41</sup> other cultures has been pointed out by Baumann (2006), citing the Argentinean klezmer clarinetist Gorla Feidman:

‘Klezmer is not Jewish music’, so äußerte sich Feidman zu der inzwischen universalisierten Form der Kleztermusik, vielleicht auch zum Ärger einiger orthodoxer Revivalisten und historisierender Neo-Klezmorim. Er erklärt dies damit, dass jeder als Sänger geboren sei: ‘Gott gab uns ein Instrument des Gesangs, unseren Körper. Dies ist Klezmer’.

‘Klezmer is not Jewish music’, expressed Feidman about the current universal form of klezmer and suggests that it might anger some orthodox revivalists and historicizing Neo-Klezmorim. He explains that everybody is born a singer: ‘God gave us the instrument of song, our body. That is klezmer’.

(My translation)  
(p.124)

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<sup>41</sup> Baumann uses the word German word *Ärger*.

Perhaps Feidman is taking the Hebrew literal meaning of klezmer, which is *vessel of music*. This highlights confusion between the literal and actual meaning of klezmer, which has come to refer to a style of music; although as stated above, in Yiddish it originally referred to the musician only.<sup>42</sup> Different musicians are inclined because of any number of factors to play certain genres of music and, on one level, this collective interest binds them together. However, whilst this can be seen as cultural collectivity in the case of heritage musics such as klezmer, I feel simply playing the music is not enough. I suspect that it might, in some cases, enhance the sense of cultural difference and challenge issues surrounding identity. This is also true within Judaism, as many Jews do not feel that the modern construct that has become klezmer is a suitable representative for their culture:

Instead of creating art – that is, cultural objects with meaning pertaining to a social reality – the klezmerim (klezmer musicians) had produced a new type of politically loaded kitsch.

(Bard-Rosenberg, 2008, p.24)

Playing certain music may bind a musician to a culture on one level, but long-established culture and inclusion is a much more complicated negotiation. Issues such as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’, for instance, can be seen as non-negotiable, although these terms are often used to describe *cultural* differences. As Stokes (1994) has pointed out, the word ethnic is often used negatively:

The notion of the ‘ethnic’ today (particularly in journalistic language) points to an area of experience around which some of the most violent conflicts in Europe are being played out, particularly in the context of ‘ethnic conflict’ in the former Soviet Union, ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Bosnia, and ‘ethnic violence’ in British cities. Perhaps this will mark a final break with the romantic notion of ‘the ethnic’ as the harmless and colourful ‘folklore’ on the remote peripheries of our own societies.

(p.7)

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<sup>42</sup> This also explains why some people write it with a capital K.

In a similar vein, Rattansi (2007) has pointed to the ‘new “cultural racism”’ (p.104) which stems from cultural differences rather than any problematic conception of racial difference. Nercessian has pointed to the dilemma that this can create:

Again, it is not difficult to see the implications of this to ethnomusicologists when the idea of ‘personal’ is transferred to the notion of ‘cultural’. People are inclined to different musics. But certain people share their inclination to a music, and in this respect they differ from people who do not. The music thus becomes agreeable through this difference between people who do and people who don’t. The demarcator of this difference is of course culture.

(2002, p.40)

Whilst this may be true, it would seem that migration and the establishment of resulting diaspora groups has heightened cultural identity rather than encouraging hegemony.<sup>43</sup> The cultural and commercial value that can be placed upon where a musician has come from, both geographically and even genealogically, has the potential to polarise musicians who cannot lay claim to this, however unintended this might be.

### **Who is playing this music and why?**

Laušević (2007) has devoted a whole chapter (pp.51-68) to the question of why musicians might choose music associated with another particular culture rather than a style associated with their upbringing. It would seem the reasons that musicians, and audiences for that matter, might subscribe to a particular style of music are broadly three-fold. The first is that they may simply like the music because of wider, more universal, aesthetically appealing features such as prominent and ‘strong... rhythm’, ‘melodies’ of a ‘passionate nature’ and ‘intensity’, all of which are features that people found appealing about Balkan music in the USA (Laušević, 2007, pp.58-59). It is perhaps important that, for the music to have wider appeal and for it to remain ““real” or “authentic”, ironically, it should not stray too far from certain ... established paradigms, or at least certain musical styles and repertoires closely resembling those from the [country of reception]’

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<sup>43</sup> Harrison (1990, p.10).

(Dennis, 2008, p.194). It should, therefore, be different yet within certain accepted, tried and tested parameters.

The second reason is that the culture associated with a particular musical repertory may fill a void in the musician's life that they feel cannot be obtained through their own cultural background. Of course, the excitement of unearthing something new and the resulting journey of discovery may add to the appeal. Laušević has pointed to:

something 'earthy', 'real', and 'true' that Americans are missing, and that it is to be found not here, but far away from home, the notion that Americans have lost, through urbanization and modernization, the truth that can still be found in other parts of the world. That truth is to be regained by drawing on the 'source', from the 'sacred soil', soil uncontaminated by modernity and commercialism.

(2007, p.229)

This desire seems, therefore, to be an important factor in the Real Deal and is certainly concurrent with Taylor's three malaises as outlined above. As these desires may hold similar motives for non-musicians attending concerts, I wonder if this might lessen the appeal of non-native performers who may not evoke this 'far away from home' place? Or, is the musicians' interest in the style to be commended by the audience? As well as filling a perceived void, it may also be the case that the music may be an extension or wider exploration of an indigenous folk style already played at home.

The third reason may be that the instrument the musician plays may be prevalent in that style. I have certainly found this to be true in my own case as a tuba player. Klezmer and Balkan genres, for instance, often use a tuba rather than a double bass or, in the case of many folk genres, no bass instrument. These styles certainly yield work for me and may be an important - or, for some musicians - sole source of income. Also, the technical challenges and demands on musicianship that can be found in these styles for certain instruments, such as klezmer clarinet and Balkan trumpet, may be appealing to a musician looking to expand technical vocabulary (see Frank London's comments in Slobin, 2002, p.208). Also, microtonal elements, unfamiliar time signatures and an expanded palette of ornaments may be of interest to the curious musician.

Perhaps inevitably, the above points are mainly applicable to musicians coming to a style external to their culture. As Laušević is keen to point out, ‘we might never ask why... a Bulgarian plays gaida... Most likely the gaida player would not wonder why either’ (2007, p.51). In the London Balkan diaspora community, I have found that there seems to be an expectation that a Bulgarian musician, for instance, will play *gaida*<sup>44</sup> or *tapan*<sup>45</sup> rather than guitar and will be informed about the music. Whilst Bulgarians may have an inevitable familiarity with their ‘own’ folk music, they may not be able to perform it; or, they may not know the words, in the same way that an English musician not specialising in folk music may not necessarily be able to perform *The Gypsy Rover* or *Greensleeves*. Tim Rice echoes this:

Could I ever really understand their tradition when it wasn't ‘in my blood’? And some ethnomusicologists have a comparable theory; outsiders are forever doomed to particular understandings compared to insiders, never mind that most Bulgarians can't play the *gaida* either.

(1997, p.110)

Regardless of the ability to play an instrument, it seems that having the tradition ‘in your blood’ counts for a great deal and allows one to claim their self-validating opinion represents an authentic view. There seems to be a widely accepted approach where this appropriation of culture is acceptable. The notion of ‘respect’ was often cited in my discussions with musicians. Quite how this ‘respect’ is measured is difficult to quantify, but it appears to shift the authority clearly into the hands of those who claim the culture as their own.

Who, therefore, has the authority to remark upon what is more authentic? Laušević (2007), a native of Sarajevo, discovered, when making initial contact with the large number of non-native Balkan music enthusiasts with whom she was studying in the USA, that she was often asked to pass judgement on the authenticity of the music. As well as being an ‘embodiment of the “Balkan culture”’ (p.8), she was frequently asked such

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<sup>44</sup> Balkan bagpipe originating from the part of Thrace that is now Bulgaria.

<sup>45</sup> Or *Tupan*, a large bass drum used in Balkan music.

questions as “‘is this one authentic?’” (*ibid.*). As a native of the Balkans, she is likely to have credence; her heritage and background give substantial weight to her opinions. These opinions are, to a certain extent, taken on trust as those discovering the music may not know any better. However, as already mentioned above, just being from the Balkans doesn’t necessarily make you an authority on Balkan Circle dancing, for example. As Laušević explains:

Those with more experience were more likely to know that ‘the natives’, in the best case, know only a couple of circle dances.  
(2007, p.8)

There is a great deal of trust placed in such ‘natives’, as Laušević calls herself. It would seem that there is the potential here for using one’s heritage credentials to assert opinions over an outsider ethnomusicologist who had, for example, studied the culture in great detail. The ethnomusicologist is not able to claim the ‘authentic’ standpoint, however informed he/she might be. This can be likened to the notion of ‘playing a card’ as in ‘playing the race card’.<sup>46</sup> It would seem authenticity is viewed over outsider learning where there is a conflict of opinions a ‘trump card’ can be played; in this case, coming from the country/culture in question. Often, simply being from a country or culture/ethnic group can be suitable credentials to pass judgment, regardless of expertise. Bigenho (2002) has called this a ‘passport’ (p.31) that is used to ‘commercially market... “world music” as sold to Western audiences’ (*ibid.*). Taylor points to the ‘ethnic/racial credibility’ that Miriam Stockley, the lead vocalist on the Delta airlines advertisement theme *Adiemus*, asserts:

I’m a native of South Africa whose grandparents were Russian Jews, and I combine sounds – not really words – from Zulu, Xhosa and Yiddish.  
(in Taylor, 2000, p.7)

Insider ethnomusicologists, however, may be accused of ‘selling out’ to both the culture of academia and commercial interests by opening the music up for analysis. This may be seen to strip the music of any spiritual dimensions that it might appear to have, simply

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<sup>46</sup> A term first coined in England in the 1960s and often used in politics.



because it is played by musicians who are seen to originate from the country that the music is identified as coming from.

In the case of klezmer, the music does not come from one country. It is labelled as a Jewish music style, but only a relatively small percentage of Jews actually associate with it. Hankus Netsky, a central figure in the start of the American klezmer revival and himself a notable academic, reveals much in the following quote:

On the other hand, many students of Klezmer are not Jewish, and once they become professional, they still find themselves subject to the suspicions of the Jewish community, which remains strongly proprietary concerning their casually discarded ethnic culture. I always tell my students that anyone who aspires to play another community's ethnic music will eventually have to prove themselves to the '*mavens*' experts of that community, and that I hope they will pass the test.  
(Netsky, 2004, p.198)<sup>47</sup>

Whilst he points out that musicians need to prove themselves to the 'experts of the community' (noticeably *not* experts external to the community) he reveals that they will be 'subject to the suspicions of the Jewish community', who we can assume are not all musicians. He then refers to a 'test', the content and manner of application are set by the community with doubtless variable criteria. This relates directly to Tim Rice's experience with learning the *gaida* pipes mentioned above, here he finds himself being judged by an elderly member of the community:

During the evening an elderly neighbor, with an impressive mustache of the type worn mainly by older villagers, approached and sat down across from me. Kostadin introduced me as the professor who had invited him to Canada for a year, and told the man that I played the *gaida*. 'Hah, an American plays the *gaida*,' he almost spat out in disbelief. He then turned to me and ordered, 'Play, and I will tell you whether you are a *gaidar* [bagpiper].' I thought, 'Oh brother, there is no way I can satisfy this guy,' particularly since my playing usually went to pot when I was nervous, as he had made me. Kostadin handed me his *gaida*, and I reluctantly began playing. When I stopped, to my surprise he smiled, seemed pleased, and said, 'You are a *gaidar*'.  
(Rice, 1997, p.111)

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<sup>47</sup> It is also possible to argue that the 'ethnic culture' was not so casually discarded.

This story reminds me of a number of other stories related by other musicians who are keen to tell of how their playing has been validated by people (not just musicians) from within the culture whose music they are playing. I have personally found that, as a foreigner abroad, I am judged differently and often initially respected for my interest in another culture. I recall singing *ochi chyornye* (lit: dark/black eyes) on a pop gig in Russia as a special feature, which seemed to be received extremely well. I couldn't help thinking that a Russian performer stepping forward to sing the same well-known folk song would not be received as positively.

The most eminent klezmer musician to be famously non-Jewish is perhaps Don Byron who, as a black clarinetist, is visibly set apart<sup>48</sup> from his fellow Jewish musicians who have largely held him up as a respected exponent of the style. In his own words:

I've played Klezmer music since 1980. But it hasn't been easy to feel *entitled* to play it. A white man plays world music, and no one questions the ethnic connection. But not too many brothers are playing music from Bulgaria. I spent hundreds of hours transcribing Katz's records: I feel entitled to the knowledge, entitled to participate. But what amazes people is that I'm a black guy doing the music of people who are supposed to be white.

(in Slobin, 2002, p.143)

Borgo (1998) has posed the direct question 'Can Blacks Play Klezmer?' as part of his discussion of Don Byron. He uses the term 'ethnic musical authenticity' (accessed online at <http://music.ucsd.edu/~dborgo/research/cbpbk.htm> 10 June 2009), which is similar to what I describe as the Real Deal. For Borgo, it seems that:

Within ethnic musical traditions, musical authenticity is often conceived of as a birth right... lived experience, early exposure, and continual immersion are the most crucial requirements.

(Borgo, *ibid.*)

As part of her discussion of authenticity in Bolivian music, Bigenho (2002) has divided authenticity in two: 'culturally' and 'experientially' authentic. Cultural authenticity seems

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<sup>48</sup> Whilst there are black Jewish groups, such as the Beta Israel, or Falasha of Israel, the vast majority of American Jews are white European.

to be very similar to what I have defined the Real Deal. She also suggests that musicians who claim to be ‘culturally authentic’ may exert control over those for whom only the experience is authentic:

Another side to this regime of cultural authenticity is a kind of policing of the very experience of musical pleasures.

(Bigenho, 2002, p.31)

This privileging of opinion, based on heritage, appears to be common where diaspora groups interact with host cultures that play ‘their’ music. Dennis (2008) has examined how Afro-Colombian groups project authority over *mestizo*<sup>49</sup> rappers simply based on their shared heritage with Black Hip Hop artists from North America:

these young artists believe that they maintain a certain privilege to hip-hop and rap, in great part, based on their belonging – actively constructed and nurtured through their music – to an imagined, diasporic, ‘black’ community of people of African descent with a common history of slavery, exploitation and racial discrimination.

(p.196)

Both groups rely, however, on the shared sense of ‘socio-economic “ghetto” discourse’ (*ibid.*, also see Elflein, 1998), although the *mestizo* displace or deemphasise the ‘black’ element, as they can’t claim or play this ‘card’. In North America, Vanilla Ice by the same token and, despite attempts to affirm his ‘realness’ or authentic credentials by ‘keeping it real’ with his ‘blonde dreads, sagging pants, and tattoos... lyrics about shooting people in the head and smoking marijuana’ (Ogbar, 2007, p.56), was never seen as a ‘real nigga’<sup>50</sup> (*ibid.*) and was mocked for his attempts. The staid debate of whether white men can sing the blues has considerable overlap here. The huge success of artists such as Eric Clapton would suggest that a great many people feel they can, although inevitably some will remain unconvinced. In saying white *men*, it is important to

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<sup>49</sup> A Colombian rapper who is either of Spanish, indigenous or mixed descent, although understood as ‘white’ when seen in relation to Afro-Colombians.

<sup>50</sup> Ogbar (2007 chapter 2, pp.37-71).

highlight the repression of women. Much of this repression is often cited vicariously as individuals may not have suffered, but the group to which they belong may have.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that authenticity is important for the production and reception of musical performance, and it has a bearing on how a musician is perceived and how they conceive themselves. It is possible, as Moore (2002) and Taylor (1997) have done, to break down authenticity into a number of elements, which may be adopted by musicians and used as 'credentials'. It has been my experience that practising musicians often refer to these elements collectively as 'the Real Deal', using this term in such a way as to make it useful for our discussions of authenticity.

Having seen above how Real Deal authenticity has been shown to be important to a wide spectrum of consumers in a modern market economy, I consider in this study how it influences musicians who perform klezmer with reference to the wider World Music scene. In using the Real Deal graph as a starting point for discussions with musicians, it became clear that, not only were we concerned with how authentic, or Real Deal, we appeared to others, but also the importance we placed on trying to feel authentic. In doing so, we hoped to come across as being sincere. There may be a discrepancy between how Real Deal we feel we are and to what extent the audience feel the same. Gilmore and Pine's (2007) fake/real matrix is useful in situating this balance on the Real Deal graph. The work of Gilmore and Pine suggest that consumers crave authenticity. This can place a commercial pressure on musicians to be perceived as the Real Deal, even when they feel they may not be.

World Music marketing relies heavily on selling authenticity and the careful manipulation of who is seen as the Real Deal is central to its success. With the additional commercial benefit of being seen as heritage music, klezmer can be a culturally and even monetarily valuable commodity. However, due its countercultural associations, some Jews feel that klezmer is too closely associated with historical repression of Jews and,

therefore, they distance themselves from it. I have introduced three bands and shown how I feel they may sit on the Real Deal graph.

Authenticity seems to be central to these issues of representation and consequently musicians' approaches to this play a large part in shaping the scene. Who or what is considered to be the Real Deal is flexible and, therefore, negotiable. As I show through my fieldwork, such perceptions are constructed not only between performer and audience but also between performers.

In the next chapter, I begin to examine my fieldwork and look at examples of mistaken identity and how potential misrepresentation may affect the way the musicians with whom I work interact. It is, after all, such encounters that prompted me to carry out this research.

## Chapter Three

### Jewdar

The term 'jewdar' first came to my attention whilst formally discussing with two musicians whether or not the audience could tell if they were Jewish or not. Whilst both musicians (one Jewish and one not) denied that people could have jewdar, the Jewish girlfriend of the Jewish musician who had been patiently listening to the entire conversation remarked 'off the record'<sup>51</sup> that there is such a phenomenon. As a result, I started incorporating this into my discussions with musicians.

Jewdar is not listed in the OED and so I looked to the internet for definitions. The online 'urban dictionary',<sup>52</sup> however, lists no less than nine, albeit similar, definitions for jewdar. The entries are offered by the general public and examples of usage are given. The first is:

The innate ability to detect Jewishness in another person. Like a sixth sense.

(Accessed online at

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=jewdar>

17 December 2011)

What is meant by *Jewishness* is often unclear. I assume that it is possible to show traits of Jewishness, whatever they might be, without being a Jew. Of course, what constitutes 'Jewish' is a hugely contentious subject. However, in this particular sense, I feel that it is most often used in a religious and matrilineal sense; that is, those born to a Jewish mother. As will be discussed later, the distinction between a musician's religion and his/her heritage is contentious, particularly when this extends to complex questions concerning the supposed existence of a Jewish race. So problematic is the adoption of klezmer for projections of Jewishness that the following condemnation of klezmer musicians is worth quoting in full:

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<sup>51</sup> I have not included any direct quotes from her in the study.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=jewdar> accessed online 22 April 2010.

The klezmer musician too is constantly at fault. What we see in klezmer is the construction of an authenticity. Whether the performer is Jewish or non-Jewish, atheist, mystic, Sephardi, or Ashkenazi, we are dealing with a tradition that finds itself fantasizing its own relationship with Jewish history as each new cultural object is produced. We are dealing with a tautology – a wholly Jewish utterance which demands that the performer is in some way authentic; that they have an empathy with the history of the Jews which, in itself, apparently allows them to identify themselves with the paradigm they create of modern-day Jewish culture. The performative nature of klezmer (the production of a wholly Jewish utterance) means that to create klezmer, to listen to it, and for all of the so-called connoisseurs to ‘understand’ it, is to create a fantasy-space of modern Jewish culture out of an understanding of Jewish history; they then place themselves within this space.

(Bard-Rosenberg, 2008, p. 25)

Placing Bard-Rosenberg’s clear disapproval of this state of affairs aside, he has summed up the scene rather well. He acknowledges that the klezmer scene is a ‘fantasy-space’ where anybody can state their claim on being the Real Deal. As musicians endeavour to be ‘authentic’, who can tell whether or not they are actually Jewish? And to what criteria might they work? There are perhaps as many definitions of Jewishness as there are Jews; but, taking Bard-Rosenberg’s comments on board, it is worth situating the general Jewish identity that is adopted with an affinity to klezmer and Yiddish. As Davis (1987) articulates when situating the root of the movement correctly in the USA:

For many of the younger generation an interest in Yiddish is a way of manifesting a Jewish identity on a purely cultural level, thus avoiding the religious mode or the nationalistic one which nowadays generally leads to Zionism. The forcing house for the revival of Yiddish is the United States, and therefore it is not surprising to find the current generation of ‘Yiddishists’ mould their attitude in terms of modern American ethnic consciousness — in search of ‘rootski’ as one Polish journalist commented on the increasing number of American Jewish visitors to his country.

(p.5)

Whilst jewdar purports to identify any Jew, it is worth making this distinction between an interest in Yiddish and klezmer and the role this might play in an individual’s heritage and the State of Israel.

The closest etymological relation to jewdar is gaydar, about which considerably more has been written.<sup>53</sup> The ‘dar’ suffix originally stems from ‘radar’, which is an acronym for Radio Detecting And Ranging. *Gaydar: the Ultimate Insider Guide to the Gay Sixth Sense* by Reuter (2002) appears to be the only book devoted to the subject and, although lighthearted in approach, it raises interesting questions. Unsurprisingly, it seems that many issues regarding gaydar are pertinent to jewdar and this became apparent in my research. With regard to issues of conversion and/or denial, it is possible to substitute ‘Jewish’ with ‘gay’ in a sentence.

As a performer of Jewish music, it is inevitable that, at times, I may strive to sound idiomatically Jewish in the way that I play. I acknowledge that what constitutes sounding Jewish is likely to vary from person to person. For some, this is a personal ideal that they strive to attain. As revealed by one musician, ‘I’ve studied it [klezmer] so that I can sound as Jewish as possible’.

I became curious to find out whether audience members might judge a performance on its ‘Jewishness’ and, if so, what do musicians feel might stimulate their jewdar. If musicians wish to sound and possibly look as Jewish as possible, then to what criteria might one work? If musicians play in a Jewish style, perhaps there is an expectation or even inclination to behave in what they understand to be a Jewish way. There seems to be a consensus amongst the musicians I interviewed that members of a Jewish audience *are* likely to be interested in whether or not the musicians are Jewish. This may only be idle speculation, but this does seem to be an aspect of performing Jewish music, to which klezmer is undeniably grouped. Here are some comments, not restricted to music, from musicians that demonstrate this:

I bet all Jewish people do this, in a kind of idle, speculative way. You kind of go ‘You see that guy? That cricketer – Jewish’, ‘No he’s not’, ‘Jewish – yes, he is you know’.

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<sup>53</sup> There is also the ‘blackdar’: ‘I Can Instantly Tell Whether Someone Is African-American With My Amazing ‘Blackdar’ accessed online 18 May 2010 <http://www.theonion.com/articles/i-can-instantly-tell-whether-someone-is-africaname.11117/> .



And what would amaze him, we would play as a duo, he would play accordion and I'd play clarinet and nobody would ask me if I was Jewish, but people would ask him quite a lot if he was Jewish and it used to really piss him off. He'd say 'Why does it matter? What difference does it make? If I can play the music...'

So, we were playing and she was playing some fantastic *doina*<sup>54</sup> and my girlfriend at the time, she was in the audience, and she overheard some old Jewish guy say to his wife 'Oh yes, she must be Jewish, she's got the Jewish soul – fantastic, but he's not Jewish you know. He can't be Jewish'. Well, actually the reverse was true.

Reuter (2002) includes a 'gaycheck' (p.128) where readers can score how 'gay' somebody is. This is preceded by a number of celebrities and movies that a gay man is likely to be familiar with. These criteria vary from physical attributes such as 'is he tattooed' and 'manicured hands' to clothing markers such as 'does he own sock garters' and does he wear a good watch?' (*ibid.*). It would seem that looking gay and sounding gay are equally important in stimulating gaydar and I suspect this distinction may be more subtle with regard to jewdar. Clearly, this is all for fun (the book is described as 'humour' by the publishers); yet, I wonder if such a checklist could be compiled for musicians performing Jewish music in order that they would be seen to be more Real Deal?

There is a distinct difference in the way gaydar and jewdar are used. In all examples that I came across for jewdar, people mentioned how they could tell if someone was Jewish as opposed to the supposedly irrefutable 'Jew'. Jews who do not adopt or endorse Judaism are often said to be 'Jew-ish' (Margolis, 2009). As gay acts as both a noun and adjective, there is no equivalent for gaydar; it is not possible to be gay-ish, although other words might have a similar meaning such as 'camp'. There is some debate, therefore, as to whether one can exhibit 'authentic' Jewish attributes without being a Jew. With regard to recorded music, obviously *sounding* what may be perceived as idiomatically Jewish would be a greater consideration than *looking* Jewish. Consequently, this issue is more pertinent in live performance. If one is to apply Gilmore and Pine's (2007) Polonius test, a non-Jew could be seen as authentically Jewish; however, due to the lack of self-

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<sup>54</sup> Freely improvised instrumental piece.

authenticity, he/she will never be a 'real-real' Jew, which is likely to have possible ramifications with regards to sincerity. Perhaps a real-fake musician may be seen as Jewish, whereas only a real-real may be a Jew.

Whilst there is an element of light-heartedness surrounding the notion of *jewdar*, it highlights the fact that musicians need to have a consciously projected idea about what an audience might expect, particularly with regard to satisfying their perceptions about whether the musicians are the Real Deal: in this case, Jewish. Curiously enough, performers generally do not have direct contact with the audience post-performance in order to see whether expectations were met. Even if this were possible, there is no guarantee that they would be entirely honest due to issues of political correctness and general etiquette. There is, therefore, a potential pressure, perhaps for commercial reasons, that the musician's projection of their image is coherent with their own self-identification. Whether or not this correlates with their 'authentic self' may be impossible to discern. This is one of the main reasons that focus is placed on the interrelation of musicians rather than asking the audience. There is an inevitability, therefore, that musicians will draw upon stereotypes and this raises a number of problems and dilemmas.

## **Stereotypes**

Reuter's *Gaydar* book (2002) is grounded in stereotypes and promises to guide the reader towards some of the more subtle stereotypes in order to hone their *gaydar*. An awareness of stereotypes is important for both audience and musician for a full understanding of the Real Deal. The differing perceptions of what constitutes a stereotype and its varying strengths have potential to cause tension between musicians.

Musicians are often required to second-guess what their audiences might respond positively to. The more uninformed the audience are, the more necessary it may be to call upon stereotypes in order to convince them that the musicians are the Real Deal: 'stereotypes require exaggeration, a distortion of traits which may be founded in

objective reality and thus recognized as being “real” (Cottrell, 2004, p.130). In practice, stereotypes can often be subtle and musicians are often unaware that they are using them. In terms of my Real Deal graph, I argue that most stereotyped performances fall in the bottom left of the graph.

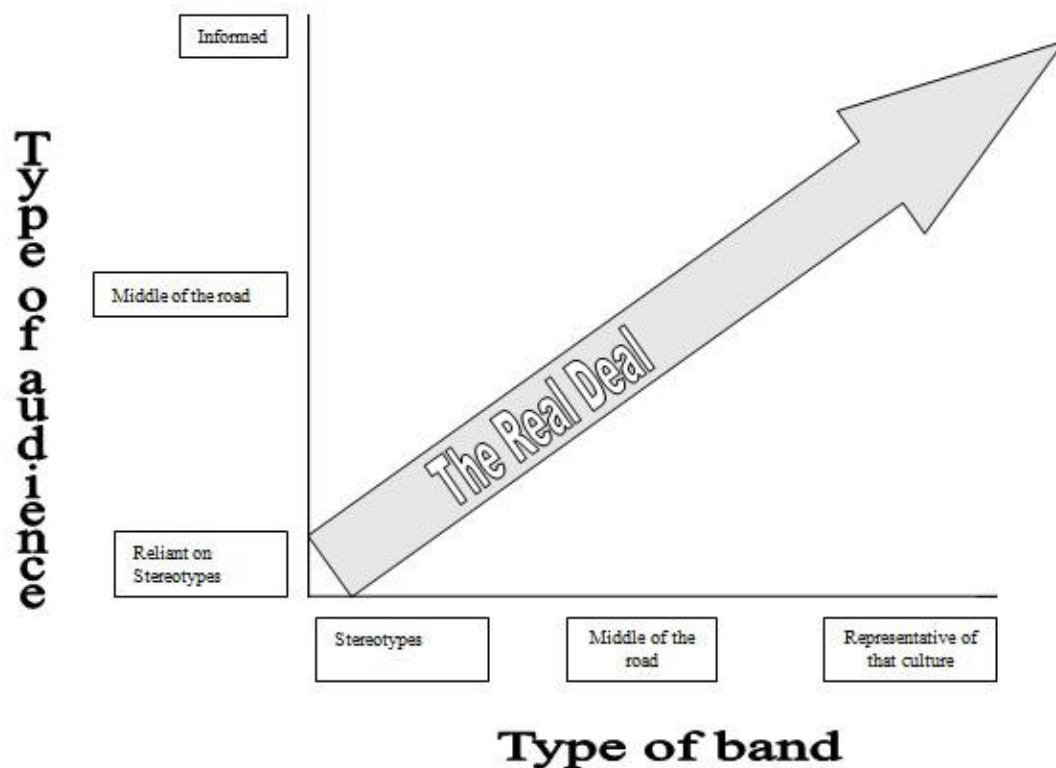


Figure 11 *The Real Deal graph*

Writing about klezmer in Germany, Gruber (2002) comments on how musicians ‘involve stereotypes or idealized visions of what Jews were, what they are, and what they represent. They involve the use of Things (*sic.*) Jewish as unconscious surrogates’ (p.200). It would appear that stereotyping is generally seen as a negative process, most likely because it strips individuality from the performance. However, an audience would need to have a familiarity with the culture concerned in order to be aware of stereotyping. As Gerstin articulates:

It is, of course, a function of stereotypes to gloss over nuances and exceptions, while exaggerating commonalities. As Fredrik Barth puts it with regards to ethnic stereotypes, there is only a loose fit between stereotype and reality, so that 'simple ethnic dichotomies can be retained, and their stereotyped behavioural differential reinforced, despite a considerable objective variation'.

(Gerstin, 1998, p.410)

In commercial terms, stereotyping can be seen as a necessary move in keeping the widest possible audience happy by relying on the familiar. Such stereotypes are built up over centuries and, as films such as *Borat* (2006) show, they are very much alive today and still used for comedic effect. The eponymous character played by Sacha Baron Cohen is from Kazakhstan, yet greets people by saying *jak sie masz*<sup>55</sup> which is Polish. He also speaks Hebrew a number of times in the film. The character relies on stereotypes and, as a result, such an inaccuracy goes unnoticed by the majority of the viewers. It is entirely plausible that musicians call upon stereotypes to enhance their performance unaware that they are seen as stereotypes.

Schiff (1982) looks at the history of 'the Jew' on stage. Early portrayals stemmed from characters 'masquerading' as Jews in order to 'accomplish his nefarious deeds' (p.18), such as in John Webster's *Devil's Law Case* (1618). Interestingly, the 2002 *Concise OED* makes no mention of the historical, derogatory use of the word Jew. The *Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary* (ed. Robinson, 1999) lists as the third meaning of Jew:

*Offensive, old use, a miser; an unrelenting bargainer.*

Erdman's book *Staging the Jew* (1997) deals with the dilemmas faced by actors who are required to play Jewish characters, or 'the Jew'. It is worth pointing out that there is a significant difference between 'Jewish', 'Jews' and the 'the Jew', with the latter carrying more derogatory connotations. I have been made aware of this distinction on a number of occasions, as well witnessing a number of permutations such as Jew-ish.<sup>56</sup> Gottlieb (2004) points to Mencken (1921), who gives advice to editors:

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<sup>55</sup> Lit: 'how are you' in Polish.

<sup>56</sup> See Margolis (2009). 'Not Jewish but Jew-ish' *The Guardian* 30 November 2009.

The application of the word *Jew* or *Jewish* to any individual is to be avoided... unless the facts have some relation to his being... Thus, if a Jew is convicted of a crime, he should not be called a *Jewish criminal*; ... if a Jew makes a great Scientific discovery, he should not be called an eminent *Jewish scientist*. The word *Jew* is a noun, and should never be used as an adjective or verb.

(Mencken, 1921, p.298)

Erdman devotes a considerable amount of time to what he calls ‘that time-honoured manifestation of Jewish difference, that badge of Semitic authenticity: the nose’ (Erdmann, 1997, p.2). Physically, however, Jews are diverse and this is manifest in Israel. As Lindholm points out:

The major division among Jews in Israel is between the Mizrachim (Middle Easterners, Spanish Sephardim, and Asians) and the Ashkenazim (northwestern Europeans); but there are internal divisions as well, as Yemeni Jews differentiate themselves from Bukhran Jews, Iraqi Jews are distinct from Moroccan Jews, Russians differ from Poles and Romanians, and so on.

(Lindholm, 2008, p.118)<sup>57</sup>

It would seem that the dominant stereotypes of Jews in London stem from Ashkenazi Jews and are also heavily reliant on American mass media. Physical stereotypes of Jews are firmly established and have long been the material of comedy as well as derision. Famously and controversially, Alec Guinness in his portrayal of Fagin in the 1948 film *Oliver!* sported a large, prosthetic nose:

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<sup>57</sup> Many believe that the Ashkenazim originate in Eastern Europe, however.



Figure 12 A young Alec Guinness, and as Fagin

Charles Dickens was called upon to defend himself after labelling Fagin ‘the Jew’ in *Oliver Twist*. As Schiff relates:

He is called ‘The Jew’, not because of his religion, but because of his race. If I were to write a story, in which I pursued a Frenchman, or Spaniard, as ‘the Roman Catholic’, I should do a very indecent and unjustifiable thing; but I make mention of Fagin as the Jew, because he is one of the Jewish people, and because it conveys that kind of idea of him, which I should give my readers of a Chinaman by calling him a Chinese.

(Dickens in Schiff, 1982, p.21)

The 1948 film was deemed so anti-Semitic that it was banned in the US for three years. The trend in recent years has been for actors playing Fagin to avoid wearing a prosthetic nose (see Rampton, 1999, for a discussion surrounding Robert Lindsay’s portrayal). Interestingly, a 2008 article in *The Observer*<sup>58</sup> mentions how Rowan Atkinson did not wear a prosthetic nose when performing in the West End production of *Oliver!* Ironically, it is significant that the picture used in the article places heavy emphasis on the nose:

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<sup>58</sup> Sunday, 28 December 2008.



Figure 13 Rowan Atkinson ('Fagin goes forth in the West End' in *The Observer* 28 December 2008)

The *Jewish Chronicle*<sup>59</sup> on the other hand, has a whole article devoted to playing the part of Fagin, with considerable attention to the nose, prosthetic or not. The actor Jonathan Pryce, in the same JC article, shows us jewdar in action, albeit misfiring:

'I've got my own nose,' says Pryce. 'And I always had the security of knowing that when Mel Brooks took me out for lunch he thought I was Jewish. And if Mel Brooks thinks you're Jewish, you're Jewish.'

'This is how you play Fagin, Rowan' in *The Jewish Chronicle* accessed online 19 May 2010 <http://www.thejc.com/arts/theatre-features/this-how-you-play-fagin-rowan>

This also suggests how Pryce feels validated by a prominent Jewish performer. It would appear that, if actors are frowned upon for enhancing their noses, it would most certainly be frowned upon for a musician to do so. Make-up is a tool of the trade for actors, but not musicians. This would also be at odds with any sense of the musician being 'real-real', to use Gilmore and Pine's Polonius test.<sup>60</sup>

The fact remains, therefore, that some features are seen as being stereotypically Jewish and are now frowned upon if they are appropriated. It may even be more apt to use the

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<sup>59</sup> 18 December 2008.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 2.

term ‘misappropriated’. In many ways, there is considerable overlap with the blackface minstrel tradition, where white performers would ‘black up’ for performances. Gruber (2002) remarks how ‘some Jews deride non-Jewish klezmer as nothing more than kitsch that perpetrates offenses reminiscent of blackface minstrel shows’ (p.227). Certainly, such sensibilities were encountered whilst organising the Rumpelstiltskin stilt-walking band.

Although now largely forgotten, there existed a parallel tradition of ‘Jewface’, where performers might don a prosthetic nose and possibly a curly wig. Some of the songs are preserved on a compilation album of the same name, with songs making clear references to stereotypes that were prominent towards the beginning of the twentieth century such as ‘When Mose with his Nose Leads the Band’:



Figure 14 *Jewface* (2006)

Such was the dominance of Jewish immigrant composers on Tin Pan Alley that it is unsurprising that there exists a repertoire projecting their cultural background. Such music is more likely to have been composed for commercial reasons, using familiar references to the New York Jewish community, rather than for any personal motives on the part of the composers. It is also unsurprising that the majority of the performers of ‘Jewface’ music, although it can hardly be called a genre, were themselves Jewish. As



discussed below, the Jewish tendency for self-deprecation<sup>61</sup> for comedic purposes is long established. Although this can certainly be traced back further, the impact of Yiddish cabaret around the turn of the twentieth century is likely to have been an influence. That this occurred in New York, with such a large Jewish dominance on Broadway, is significant in terms of the dissemination of Jewish stereotypes. This later spread to Hollywood, where Jews are well-represented, and was transmitted to the world via the film industry.

In any discussion of what could be viewed as phenotyping, the argument is distanced from the concept of 'race'. Such stereotypes emerged at a time when the notion of 'race' maintained certain credibility. However, the confusion between stereotypes surrounding culture and 'race' is a complex one. As Rattansi articulates:

In practice, though, *cultural* demarcations are often drawn and used in a form that *naturalizes* them by implying that they are more or less *immutable*. Thus the supposed avariciousness of Jews, the alleged aggressiveness of Africans and African Americans, the criminality of Afro-Caribbeans or the slyness of "Orientals", become traits that are invariably attached to these groups over extremely long periods of time. The descriptions may then be drawn upon as part of a common-sense vocabulary of stereotypes that blur any strict distinction between culture and biology. ... Thus the slippage into the idea of Jews as a 'race' *and* religious group is easily made via the bridging concept of an almost invariable trait of monetary greed, and where the exception "only proves the rule", thus, making the statement immune to empirical counter-cases.

(2007, pp.104-105)

Much has been made of the links between the Jewish popular culture influence as outlined above and uniquely 'Jewish' elements in the music, such as Synagogue chant. Gottlieb (2004) has devoted an entire book to the subject called *Funny, it doesn't sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood*. This raises a number of interesting points. First, that such a book exists is an indicator of interest by some sections of the Jewish community in seeking out uniquely Jewish elements in all things. This could be said to be another

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<sup>61</sup> Cottrell (2004) proposes that 'self-deprecation... is a recurring theme in musicians' humour, particularly when it occurs spontaneously rather than in jokes contained within formal patterns' (p.137).

aspect of jewdar. Such is the variety in Synagogue chant, and the vast repertoire in question, that it is unsurprising that there is some overlap. As one Jewish musician articulated it:

But usually you get a sense for it. But I think if you look for something, if your modus operandi is that you look for a Jew, or you look for the gay, or you look for the ... then you'll find it, because you spend all your time concentrating on and getting sensitive to what it is about people that do that. The question is, is there something that is identifiable in that way? Objectively, is there something? [PT That's quintessentially Jewish, that Jewish people do?] I don't know. But I know a lot of Jewish people who believe there is.

The second point is that it is interesting that anyone would dedicate that level of study to finding links between Broadway musicals and Synagogue chant. The implication is that there is an inadvertent tendency for Jewish composers to compose with liturgical influences, although it could also be that other Jews may recognise liturgical elements, albeit subconsciously. This might be prevalent in Jewish musicians with regard to improvised music. This would, however, be difficult to quantify with any degree of accuracy as the musician may not be aware that he/she is doing it.

Third, Gottlieb makes some claims about what might constitute sounding Jewish, although he states that 'there can never be a consensus on what constitutes Jewish music' (2002, p.12). In this particular case, Yiddish 'folk' song and Synagogue melodies are used as the reference points. Alexander Knapp offers a considered and well-thought-out response to the question of what constitutes Jewish music in Abramson (1989) and points to Sach's problematic definition (1957), which makes no reference to musical features:

that music which is made by Jews, for Jews, as Jews

(in Móricz, 2008, p.1)

Knapp, concurring with Gottlieb, also points to the religious influences on what might be termed 'Jewish' music:

But the enormously wide diversity of styles can, to some extent, be garnered if a more geographical-historical approach is adopted: ‘that music which traces its origins directly or indirectly to the Temple Chant of some 2,000 years ago, but which has over the centuries been subjected to the innumerable non-Jewish influences of the Diaspora’.

(Knapp in Abramson, 1989, p.531)

This is in keeping with the JMI’s definition, which stresses the importance of religious origins<sup>62</sup> (accessed online 19 May 2010 <http://www.jmi.org.uk/jewishmusic.html>). The two main klezmer modes *Mi Shebarakh* (lit: He who blesses) and *Ahava Raba* (lit: a great love) come from the Jewish prayers, which are traditionally cantillated using these modes. This can sometimes be misleading, as *Ahava Raba* bears much in common with the *Hijaz* group of makams and *Mi Shebarach* is used in much Western Ukrainian music, to name but a few examples.

It is possible, therefore, that those Jewish musicians who have had a religious upbringing might have a tendency, however unconscious, to play with inflections of synagogue (cantorial) music. As one non-Jewish musician pointed out:

They might have had more influences in their childhood. They might know more melodies, they might have more knowledge of the dances and how it all fits into a cultural sphere. Whereas the non-Jewish [violin] player might see that music in isolation – away from the social context.

As was pointed out by another (Jewish) musician, this is not always the case, particularly on the London klezmer scene, which is largely secular in approach:

But that’s the thing: not all Jewish people have heard this music since childhood. [PT: Absolutely not] So when you say, maybe a Jewish person is going to be better because they know more tunes, they know the situation for which it is designed better – it’s not necessarily the case though. Well, I didn’t grow up with this music so I feel that perhaps I feel more affinity with it than certain other people who maybe don’t have family background in that way.

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<sup>62</sup> Although the JMI website differs factually: ‘Jewish music stems from ancient prayer chants of the Levant some 3000 years ago’ (my emphasis).

There is, therefore, an assumption here that knowing more tunes and, importantly, the context of them, is more likely to be an indicator of being Jewish. Knowledge of customs and the application of ‘tunes’ seems to take priority over skill or perceived skill when playing an instrument in this case.

A Jewish-sounding surname is likely to suggest to the audience and other colleagues that a musician is Jewish. As one musician put it, ‘it can’t hurt’. Interestingly, there is a quandary in that a person with a Jewish father will generally retain the family name. This can sometimes be at odds with the matriarchal lineage, which is seen by many strands of Judaism as important in defining who is Jewish - or, more precisely, a Jew. This is the case with a number of the musicians I work with; they have a Jewish-sounding surname, yet only the father is Jewish. This is not to suggest that they are less likely to absorb and transmit Jewish culture. However, this is often a contentious issue when they are seen as being very Jewish by many, but are technically not seen as Jewish by more observant Jews, and not certainly by the rabbinical court of Judaism, the *Beth Din* (*lit*: house of judgment). This genealogical tie to the religion has led to Judaism being seen by many as a ‘race’. This is problematic, not least when Jews feel they are being discriminated against as a result of their religion. This raises the question: Is it possible to be ‘racially’ Jewish? This has been most clearly articulated in the legal action taken in 2009 against the largest Jewish secondary school in the country, JFS.<sup>63</sup> Lords Justice Sedley, Rimer and Lady Justice Smith concluded that:

the requirement that if a pupil is to qualify for admission his mother must be Jewish, whether by descent or conversion, is a test of ethnicity which contravenes the Race Relations Act 1976.

(Accessed online  
<http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2009/626.html>  
6 December 2011)

The intricacies of the case aside, this ruling argues that it is possible to be considered Jewish on account of one’s heritage. However, because the mother can be Jewish *by conversion*, any notion of ‘race’ must be cast aside and being Jewish cannot be seen as a

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<sup>63</sup> The Jews’ Free School.

racial category. Indeed, any attempts to categorise on account of supposed 'race' are fraught with problems that are rooted in outdated nineteenth-century thought. As this ruling suggests, however, these 'racial' suggestions do have a very real impact on people's lives. Similar issues are at play with regard to citizenship of the State of Israel (see Lentin, 2008).

As a consequence of the negative connotations surrounding the contentious notion of 'race', the term is often used as an 'Aunt Sally'. That is, it is something constructed in order to deliberately set up a target. 'Race' can, therefore, be seen or used as a marker of power relation. As Rattansi writes:

the drawing of boundaries and the creation of identities emerge out of a *process* in which individuals have to decide and assert who they are in *negotiation* with other identity-assigning agents such as their families, the religious communities into which they may be born, the education system which grades and labels them in various ways, and local and national state regulations, including race relations legislation. Thus, identities are the outcome of *processes of power relations* and are located in *structures of authority*.

(2007, p.116)

Therefore, regardless of the fact that 'race' as a concept, along with other contentious categories such as 'ethnicity', can be discredited, their role in power relations and establishing authority remain important. As Herzfeld (2001) put it, these notions 'die hard' (p.10). Nonetheless, these terms abound in the place of what should more correctly be termed 'culture'.

As demonstrated in my own case, a name is often seen as something concrete and a marker of cultural background in today's society. As Mark Slobin puts it:

It's hard to imagine anyone in today's klezmer world changing his or her name for any reason, contractual, ethnic, or personal. The marketing of klezmer has grown increasingly sophisticated as the younger generation of revivalists slowly goes gray.

(Slobin, 2000a, p.84)

Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why I have been exposed to so many cases of mistaken identity with such a Ukrainian-sounding surname. I have found a small number of klezmer performers, some quite prominent, who have altered their surname either by simply changing it or preserving a name from further back in their heritage in order to make themselves sound more Jewish.

If a musician has a Jewish name and plays what is perceived to be Jewish music, are musicians likely to make links, however tenuous, between sounding Jewish and looking Jewish? I was pleasantly surprised to discover a book called *Funny, you don't look Jewish* (Brichto, 1994). I hoped that this book might attempt to deal with some of the issues surrounding Jewish racial stereotypes. However, apart from a line on the opening page quoting a London shopkeeper, this is not the case:

‘I could tell you were Jewish. It’s in the eyes, I can always tell from the eyes.’ Others can tell from the nose, the manner of speaking or some other characteristic.

(p.1)

The rest of the book completely ignores physical attributes and focuses on what it is to be Jewish in a social, cultural and religious way. This book provided little information on my suspicions that a person’s jewdar is honed by looking for stereotypical features, in the same way that gaydar clearly seems to be. Raphael’s (2009) book *Judaism and the Visual Image*, in which the title of Chapter Three asks ‘What does a Jewish Woman Look Like?’ (p.65), also struggles with stereotypes. Of course, there can be no objective physical markers of a person’s Jewishness. It is unsurprising, therefore, that many people draw on such subjective markers to justify their suspicions of any supposed ‘racial’ typing.

It is interesting, then, that the eyes have been used in Brichto’s book as a rather subjective marker of Jewish identity. Whilst watching a concert of Eastern European music, I overheard a member of the audience comment about the eyes one of the musicians, whom I later interviewed, saying that he looked ‘Russian’, despite this not being the case. Individual perceptions about stereotypes are inevitably varied, as are musicians’

perceptions about how stereotypically Jewish they might look. I asked several of the musicians how Jewish they thought they and other musicians looked. The responses certainly seemed to fit the ambiguous profile, as outlined in the above examples.

I look maybe a little bit Jewish, but not that Jewish, I don't know what sort of... I don't know, I've got a bit of a Woody Allen look, maybe – possibly? I don't know – I'm a little bit eccentric, which perhaps goes with the Jewish musician thing, I don't know.

Quite often people say things to me like, you know, you must have some Eastern European background because they look at me and they think that I don't look that... I clearly look a bit foreign and the music makes me look a bit more foreign, you know, a foreign-sounding soundtrack.

I think I would have to have some more, slightly Jewish credentials. Either my hair, curly hair, or a big nose or something.

Well, you know – a really long schnoz<sup>64</sup> with, you know, the... Well, kind of dark hair. [PT: You don't have dark hair. You don't have black hair, do you?] No, but I was only born half Jewish, you know.

He looks fully Jewish.

Facially, he could have been Jewish. Quite easily. Dark hair, he had the kind of dark eyes... he could easily have been Jewish. Amongst a crowd of Jews, he wouldn't stand out.

There is a great deal of interest in people who do not conform to these stereotypes and, the more profoundly they differ, the greater the interest. This would seem to be the ultimate test of jewdar: to identify someone as Jewish, despite the fact that they do not display any of the physical stereotypes outlined above. This is another close similarity with gaydar and is manifest in so-called *Metrosexual* men who do not display any stereotypical signs of homosexuality. The website <http://funnyyoudontlookjewish.com/> offers an online test where it is possible to exercise your jewdar on celebrities displaying a wide range of looks. Significantly, many of the least stereotypically Jewish-looking celebrities are converts. Perhaps the most famous of these is Sammy Davis Junior. This

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<sup>64</sup> American Yiddish for nose.

does seem to preoccupy Jews, as Gottlieb (2004) remarks: ‘Does anyone ever remark on the “Catholic look” - or whatever – of a prominent personality?’ (p.3).

Whilst talking with one musician, I was made aware that some musicians may look for reasons why they have certain physical attributes. This can be seen as something of a ‘red herring’ and may explain the attention that a musician’s physical appearance receives. The release of Shlomo Sands’ book *The Invention of the Jewish People* in 2009 which, amongst other claims, related to the State of Israel, asserts that ‘if in the nineteenth century scholars were doubtful about the conversion of the Khazar kingdom, today it is not in dispute’ (p.221). Whether or not one agrees with Sands and others (Brook, 2002), this topic has received a great deal of attention. The following quote reveals how some musicians justify the way they look:

When you say ‘the Jewish nose’ – I mean, look at [the image of] my [relative] over there, he’s got a very Jewish nose but he probably doesn’t have a single drop of blood from Egypt in him. He was probably from Khazaria. ... We are from Khazaria... we have big noses because the Khazarians had big noses.

What is being suggested here is that the stereotypical features outlined above, such as the Jewish nose and the curly dark/black hair, are not descended from the Biblical Jews, but instead from the Ashkenazi Jews, who stem predominantly from Khazaria, an independent state around the Black, Caspian and Aral Sea that flourished from about 650 CE to 1016 CE. The Khazars were of Turkic origin and ‘at some stage between the mid-eighth and mid-ninth centuries, they adopted Jewish monotheism as their particular faith and rite’ (Sands, 2009, p.221). Whether or not one believes this, it is somewhat beside the point. Many musicians seek justification for the attention their physical features receive. This has become so important to some people that it is possible to undertake thorough DNA testing to try and trace one’s heritage,<sup>65</sup> although none of the musicians interviewed discussed ever taking such a test. Many Ashkenazi Jews are traced back to Khazaria rather than any area within the State of Israel. This is, of course, not to suggest that Ashkenazi Jews are any less Jewish than the Sephardim, for instance, but it does

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<sup>65</sup> See <http://www.jewishgen.org/dna/> for example.



highlight the importance that some Jews still give to supposed 'racial' lineage and also the spurious nature of these links.

Whilst notions of 'race' and 'ethnicity' can be quickly discredited, the importance of such terms in establishing whether a musician may be perceived as the Real Deal cannot be so easily discarded. In the current political climate, where 'racism' is seen as abhorrent, people must, therefore, construct their own personal concept of 'race' which, as Rattansi (2007) has remarked, is primarily based on *cultural* differences (p.8). As can be seen, these issues are taken into consideration by musicians and any discrimination on those grounds, which may be seen in a positive *or* negative light, have a bearing on how they interact.

### **Unspoken empowerment through 'blackness'**

I have touched on the historical similarities between blackface and jewface and I have also examined 'authority over authenticity'. I shall now develop this further and look at how the notion and perception of 'blackness' with regard to Jews may empower musicians. Initially, this might seem to be at odds with how some musicians might view Jews racially. Previously discussed was the African-American klezmer clarinettist Don Byron, who said:

But what amazes people is that I'm a black guy doing the music of people who are supposed to be white.

(in Slobin, 2002, p.143)

Stratton (2009) has highlighted how the black/white dichotomy is not necessarily one of actual supposed racial typing, or attempts to phenotype, but instead a perception of otherness, which he deems to be a desirable quality in a performer.<sup>66</sup> He compares the reception of two Jewish pop music performers, the late Amy Winehouse and Rachel Stevens:

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<sup>66</sup> This has also been discussed with relation to Gypsies by Currid (2007, pp.44-48).

What makes Winehouse credible is the extent to which her artistry can be experienced as authentically black. David Kaufmann, writing about *Frank*<sup>67</sup> in *The Jewish Daily Forward* in 2007, commented that, 'in a blind taste test, I have found it very easy to fool several friends into thinking that Winehouse is black, American and much older than her (now) 23 years'.<sup>68</sup> This distinction functions within a dichotomous aesthetic structure in which white pop music is considered to be inherently less authentic, because less emotionally expressive, than black music. Roberta Freund Schwartz explains that, in the 1960s, 'The prevailing notion amongst British musicians was that the emotion behind blues constituted its entire substance, and that once grasped it could be applied to a number of related genres.'<sup>69</sup>

(Stratton, 2009, p.182)

I suspect that what Stratton refers to as 'credible' has considerable overlap with the Real Deal. It is interesting to note that, although Stratton feels Winehouse could be 'experienced as authentically black', he uses a 'blind taste test' to justify this. Later in the same chapter, he remarks how 'Winehouse looked quite dark. Given her associations with blackness, and the apparent authenticity that goes with it' (*ibid.*, p.195). Is it possible to deduce that, because she looked more 'dark' than another Jewish performer of a similar age (such as Rachel Stevens), that she was more 'credible'? Did her dark features, therefore, form part of her Real Deal *credentials* as a Jewish performer?

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<sup>67</sup> 2003 album by Winehouse.

<sup>68</sup> David Kaufmann, *Amy Winehouse Mixes Vulgarly with Sophistication*, 16 March 2007, at: <http://www.forward.com/articles/not-a-nice-jewish-girl/>, accessed 15 May 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Schwartz (2007) *How Britain Got the Blues*, p.237.



Figure 15 Amy Winehouse and Rachel Stevens

Winehouse had more features in common with the Jewish stereotypes as outlined above, such as a distinctive nose and black hair. I wonder, therefore, if there is any truth in Schwartz's assertion that the 'emotion' in blues music, if related to 'blackness', can be applied to klezmer: are 'darker' musicians likely to use this to their advantage as a performer? As one Jewish musician replied when it was suggested that this might be the case:

I don't play it more than it is. And I don't say that somebody isn't [Middle Eastern], therefore he doesn't know what he's talking about. I would never say that I'm [Middle Eastern], and I grew up [there] and this and that. I am what I am. My father and my grandfather – my father's side – grew up [there] and I heard some Arabic music when I was growing up and that affected me and that influenced me. And I was born in [the Middle East] and there was obviously some Arabic stuff or music around there. ... It's affected me and it's helped me develop and I've had a push with the language and the culture because both my grandparents were Arabic and stuff. I'm not ever going to say I'm [Middle Eastern].

There is an inevitable element here of self-defence whereby the performer's cultural heritage is justified very factually. It was very difficult to get musicians to talk about the potential advantages of looking stereotypically Jewish as musicians are, for obvious

reasons, keen to be identified by their acquired musical skills rather than their physical appearance. For this reason, this type of empowerment remains largely unspoken about and problematic to identify. Musicians who do not have these stereotypically Jewish features made a point of mentioning this, for example ‘You’ve got blonde hair and so have I... There’s thousands of Jewish [people] who look like me.’ Although musicians were reluctant to dwell on this topic, most acknowledged that it was likely to be a factor in whether the audience perceived a musician as the Real Deal or not. As one Jewish musician articulated:

Some people like it. Some people probably. But then again, some people need it. Some people need to feel, like I said earlier, a punter needs to feel that what they are seeing, hearing and experienced fits with their model. Otherwise it’s uncomfortable.

I maintain that, although this is difficult to quantify, the way a musician looks has the potential to empower them and they may not acknowledge this as a factor in their professional life.

### **Jewdar and the Real Deal**

Returning to my Real Deal graph, I conclude that a musician who looks stereotypically Jewish will have enhanced Real Deal credentials in the bottom left of the graph, regardless of whether he or she actually was born to a Jewish mother (or father).

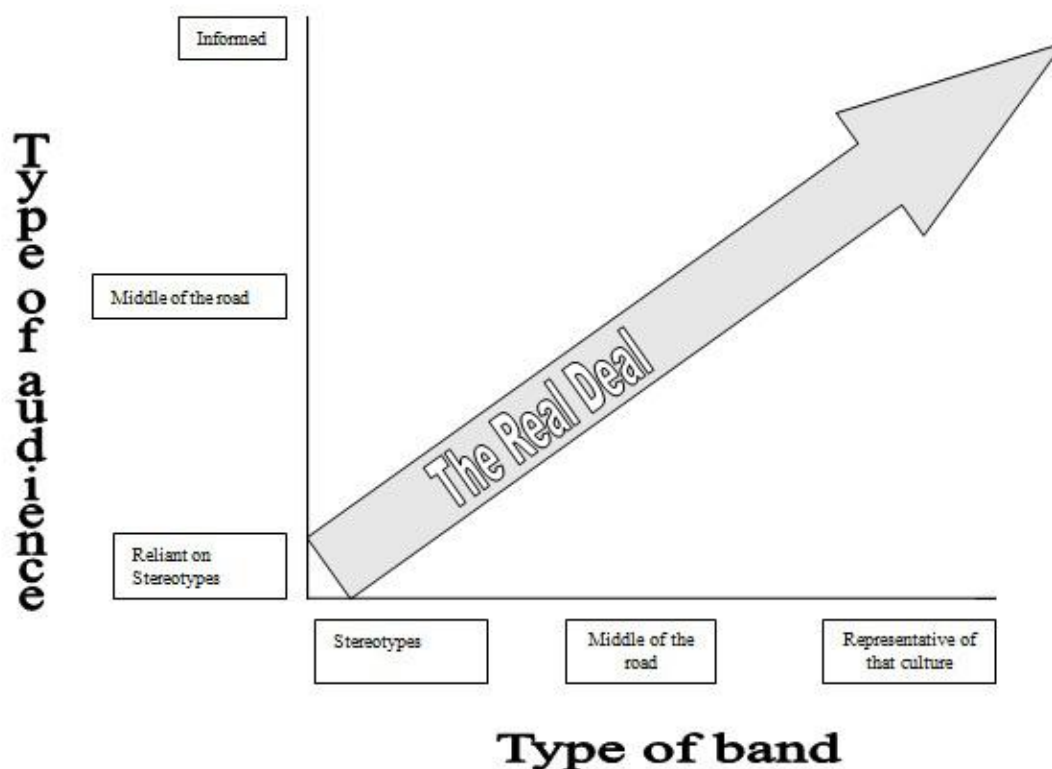


Figure 16 *The Real Deal Graph*

It seems that the way a musician looks in relation to the above-mentioned stereotypes is one of the clearest markers of whether or not they are likely to be Jewish, particularly in the bottom left of the graph. It is also likely to be one of the most irrefutable, as it is difficult to change physical attributes. Acknowledging broad stereotypes is generally frowned upon in society, but is necessary in order for jewdar to exist. Other sociocultural factors also form stereotypes such as gesture (the Jewish hands), while the use of language (use of well-known Yiddish terms) also appears to play a part in identification.

Jewdar may be aimed at all types of musicians at all types of events, even non-Jewish. There appears to be a strong relationship between the Real Deal line and jewdar, particularly with regard to meeting audience expectations of stereotypes.

### **The question: ‘are you Jewish?’**

As a musician performing at a wide range of Jewish events, I am frequently asked this question. This was enthusiastically discussed with all the musicians involved in this study in order to find out if they had similar experiences, why they thought it was necessary for the audience member to ask this and if this had any implications for how we, as musicians, work together.

The first observation was that this held little significance for musicians who self-identified as being Jewish. As one German/Jewish performer says in Eckstaedt (2003) ‘On the question “why I play Jewish music?” Rebecca answers “it is my music, and when I’m Chilean and I play Chilean music, then nobody questions it either!”’ (p.237). This is, perhaps, an obvious point, as they are likely to be used to this cultural inquisitiveness. As one Jewish musician articulated:

Do people care in the audience, care if you are Jewish or not? I don’t think that they do. If you are talking about people like me. If you are talking about non-religious people like me. If you go to a religious environment... then I think people would, you know, bullshit you about it.

Jewish musicians certainly acknowledge that audiences are likely to ask if they are Jewish or not, but do not appear to give it further thought. Conversely, non-Jewish musicians seem to be very conscious of the fact that they are not Jewish at events and can be wary of acting inappropriately. This non-Jewish musician, who is involved in providing bands for Jewish functions, has considered this:

I think it’s probably because if you’d never been to a Jewish wedding or a *barmitzvah*, you may not know really what was appropriate. I think we’ve certainly learnt a lot, you know, [some of the band are Jewish] and have been to a few *barmitzvahs* in their time when they were growing up and weddings and that sort of thing, but actually – there’s a lot of uncertainty. There’s no format for a wedding, really – there’s no set format – so I think that people want to be a bit reassured that you know what’s going to go on. I don’t sense that it’s really from a religious point of view or it’s just kind of like, ‘can we trust you to do the job right?’ Is the sense I get, I don’t know about...

Whether it is the case that a Jewish audience is likely to be reassured by a band of Jewish musicians or not is difficult to discern. It is possible that a Jewish musician had a secular upbringing and may not have an understanding of certain religious practices. However, it is likely that a Jewish musician will have an understanding of cultural practices and will feel comfortable at such events. As one musician put it:

I suppose that if there is a Jewish person and a non-Jewish person and they are both playing klezmer – people's assumptions about who is Jewish, is that the Jewish person would have a family member or cousin or this or you know, a great uncle, who is perhaps into the music, so even if they directly weren't brought up in that way, that maybe they had exposure to it somewhere else in their family.

For those musicians who organise gigs, it is part of their job to reassure a client that they are suitable and able. It seems that this may include asserting any Jewish members in the band, such as putting a musician with a Jewish-sounding surname as the contact person, which has happened in a number of bands in which I play. This means that Jewish musicians may become useful commodities in promoting a particular band. This is important for klezmer because, as a heritage music (Slobin, 2000a, pp.11-35), musicians are more likely to be seen as sincere if they are perceived to be Jewish. Gilmore and Pine (2007) assert that it makes good business sense to give this considered thought. There is something of a dilemma in using personal names as business names and a gamut of musicians with professional pseudonyms are testament to this. This is slightly at odds with Gilmore and Pine, who remark with regard to branding an 'authentic' product:

Consider: *who* you call yourself – the formal designations used to signify various dimensions of your self – especially the names assigned to your company, your brands, and your individual offerings. As opposed to our personal names, for which we can thank (or blame) our parents, all business names – whether bestowed on a whim or after months of research and study – are chosen specifically to represent one or more dimensions of identity... Many meaningful names not only spark memory but readily connote authenticity.

(2007, p.130)

There is potential, therefore, for tension between musicians who are able to offer their Jewish name as a commodity and those who are not. Of course, simply having a Jewish name does not guarantee that the musician will be adept at playing klezmer, yet there is an inference here that it is more likely. There would appear to be some commercial sense in having what might be referred to as a ‘token’ Jewish musician in the band.

The combining of a personal/professional name as a branding tool is problematic. I have found that an Eastern European surname is beneficial. However, there is an inherent danger for musicians in purporting to represent something that they are not. What would happen if one were to be ‘found out’ and the lie could not be maintained? In commerce, there are examples where this has worked. For instance, Gilmore and Pine point to Reuben Mattus’ ice cream company, Häagen-Dazs:

To give his creation cachet and, according to the brand’s Web site, ‘convey an aura of the old-world traditions and craftsmanship to which he remained dedicated’, Mattus gave it a Scandanavian-sounding name.

(2007, p.131)

Gilmore and Pine do not recommend such a ‘try and fool your customers’ (*ibid.*) approach, although in this case it clearly worked. When an audience member asks ‘are you Jewish?’ it is possible to lie in order to meet their expectations. There is no way that they could prove you wrong, although it is likely to prompt further discussion about family and possible common ground, which would only encourage compounding the lie. Such an approach is only likely to be successful if the audience member’s initial expectation was that the musician is Jewish. This can often be difficult to gauge. I have been asked ‘but you are Jewish, aren’t you?’ in such a manner and it can encourage an awkward situation:

Clearly, the expectation is that I am Jewish and a negative response will only deny their expectation and highlight a weakness in their jewdar. There also seems to be an expectation that non-Jews would not normally be interested in Jewish heritage music. One Jewish musician was resolute in this and asked ‘why the fuck would anyone want to



learn Jewish music?’ Herein lies the dilemma: it is good to meet audience’s expectations of Real Deal credentials, yet lying will disturb notions of authenticity of self and sincerity. Waskul has considered this dilemma in a paper entitled ‘The Importance of Insincerity and Inauthenticity for Self and Society: Why Honesty is Not the Best Policy’ (in Vannini and Williams, 2009) where, as a social experiment, he speaks his mind regardless of how it might offend. Whilst the bulk of the paper focuses on sincerity, Waskul, quoting Erickson, raises the following point:

Rather than essentialize the concept of authenticity, I suggest authenticity is much more circumstantial; ‘being authentic in today’s world does *not* necessarily mean that one is remaining true to some sort of unified or noncontradictory self’ (Erickson, 1995, p.135). Indeed, authenticity bears sharp resemblance to identity – which is both sensational and coincidental. An identity is the self’s situational definition of itself.

(2009, p.61)

Such a definition would support lying in order to maintain one’s perceived Real Deal credentials, therefore maintaining authenticity at the expense of sincerity. This would mean being insincere and one would lose any sense of authenticity of self. In terms of preserving one’s identity as the Real Deal, this would appear to be a necessary course of action.

### **Personal experiences of mistaken identity**

Although anecdotal, I give a clear example of where audience expectation of my Real Deal credentials has been misguided. During the summer of 2008, I was asked by a Jewish jazz pianist friend if I would accompany him playing for a large Jewish wedding. This required me to play accordion for the wedding ceremony and, later, to play and sing some light jazz for the reception. I was aware that the pianist was not familiar with traditional Jewish function music, particularly klezmer and other related Eastern European styles. He therefore asked me to lead the music for the ceremony, which included the popular tune *Erev Shel Shoshanim* (lit: evening of roses in modern Hebrew) as the bride arrived and *Siman Tov* (lit: good sign in modern Hebrew) after the breaking

of the glass. I also played some klezmer on the accordion as the guests were arriving. In this particular example, by leading the music I was asserting a certain familiarity and people might have been forgiven for thinking that I might well be Jewish; I was dressed in a dinner suit and wearing a *kippa* (skull cap) which was provided.

Whilst we were performing some jazz for the reception, I was approached by a Jewish lady who remarked ‘your grandfather’s name is Spencer. We are related’. I replied that that wasn’t true to the best of my knowledge. She seemed confident that it might be the case and that, if it was not, I certainly looked remarkably like her relative.

It is possible that she may not have been remarking that I might be Jewish, but there appeared to be an assumption because we were both at a Jewish wedding. Of course, I was not able to lie and say I was her relative, yet it convinced me that I *could* be mistaken as Jewish racially and am able to participate in a religious/cultural event with some authority.

Another example occurred when I was working for the JMI as stage manager at Klezmer in the Park 2009.<sup>70</sup> Whilst I was watching She’koyokh perform, I was approached by the man next to me who commented on how ‘this isn’t Jewish music... it is Arab music, it sounds like belly dancing music’. It transpired that he had booked the band to perform a few years previously and had been disappointed with how they had not ‘dressed up as Jews’. He had clearly seen me working at the event and remarked ‘but you’re Jewish, aren’t you?’ I took the opportunity to ask him what he thought and he replied that I could be and that I had ‘something Eastern and Slavic in my eyes’. Had he known my surname, his jewdar would no doubt have been further validated. I later found out that this man was Jewish and worked as a promoter. I discuss below how such pressures have impacted the workings of this particular band.

In one conversation at a post-performance party, I was asked by an audience member where my surname came from. I am keen, for the reasons outlined above, not to lie but

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<sup>70</sup> Sunday, 6 September 2009.

also to avert long-winded discussions about name-changing. I informed him that my surname was Ukrainian, but it did not necessarily mean that my heritage was as well. This prompted him to say ‘that makes sense’ and he commented on my ‘Slavic-looking cheek bones’. His perceptions about my Real Deal credentials were, therefore, validated. This conversation was overheard by another musician in the band who, possibly incensed by the white lie, interrupted and mentioned that I took my wife’s name (which is what this particular musician assumed to be the case). This raised a number of interesting points. The first is that the audience member’s assumption about my Real Deal credentials had been invalidated; the second, was the frustration shown by the other musician. There was clearly a disparity here between what the audience member wanted to hear and what the musician felt was a violation of my ‘authenticity of self’.

The use of the eyes as a dubious marker of racial typing would appear to be typical of jewdar and may be simply a politically safe response in today’s racially sensitive society. This can, of course, cause problems, where racial markers are one of the only features that can be used in initial identification. The disregarding of racial typing is prevalent in French society, and Lindholm (2008) points to these shortcomings, such as the omission from the census of ‘information on ethnic or racial backgrounds of respondents, for “fear of giving even verbal recognition to the settlement of people seen as enduringly different from the indigenous majority”’ (p.104).

### **Attire**

The level of discussion surrounding what musicians wear on stage varies from band to band. Some have particular uniformity, such as the Merlin Shepherd Quartet (below), who wear black and red, whereas others may accessorise around certain stereotypes such as the London Gypsy Orchestra (below):



Figure 17 *The Merlin Shepherd Quartet and the London Gypsy Orchestra*

Gruber's (2002) comments about potential animosity felt by Jews (such as Gruber<sup>71</sup>) about how non-Jews in Germany and Poland may dress and behave whilst performing klezmer demonstrates the sensitivities this can provoke:

Numerous non-Jewish bands, in Germany and elsewhere, dress up in pseudo-shtetl attire, for example, and one non-Jewish Polish musician in Krakow ostentatiously dons a yarmulke before each gig in a Jewish-style restaurant –

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<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, Gruber makes no mention of being Jewish on her website and instead states: 'Her mother and grandmother were born in Texas, and her grandfather, who wore a Stetson, surveyed the Texas oil fields.' Accessed online 10 June 2010  
<http://web.mac.com/ruthellengruber/iWeb/general%20site/About%20Ruth.html> .

whether as a means of demonstrating respect for Jewish sensibilities or simply as part of his act is not clear. Some Jews particularly resent what they feel is a non-Jewish theft of Jewish music and profiteering on the culture and ideas of a murdered people.

(p.227)

Dress is an important part of any performance and appropriate attire is a continual subject of debate amongst musicians. It was unsurprising that the subject of dress came up a number of times in my conversations.

Well, we see other bands, bands that play klezmer maybe wearing clothes that maybe, look a bit Eastern European such as, you know, interesting hats, interesting waistcoats. They might have some interesting facial hair or perhaps even some sort of earrings or, you know, they might look a bit more, what I would call, Eastern European, you know, a bit more Gypsy.

I can only assume that this is the kind of ‘pseudo-shtetl attire’ that Gruber refers to. Many advisory sources for Jewish events and celebrations list musicians’ dress as a consideration.<sup>72</sup> The London-based Russian/Jewish band *Balalaika* list their dress code on their website:

While we can present out music in smart casual wear, clients normally choose one of the following costumes:

Russian costume (matching red Russian shirts, black trousers)

Jewish musician (white shirts, matching waistcoats, black trousers)

(Accessed online 26 May 2010 <http://www.balalaikalondon.co.uk/hire.htm>)

Interestingly, the cover photograph of Eckstaedt (2003) shows a klezmer band wearing exactly the costume as detailed above for the ‘Jewish musician’. It seems that these ‘pseudo-shtetl’ costume ideas rely heavily on *Fiddler on the Roof*<sup>73</sup> with an attempt to formalise the dress to befit a lavish Jewish function.

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<sup>72</sup> See <http://www.jewishcelebrations.com/Advice/music.htm> or Latner (2004) for example.

<sup>73</sup> Curiously, the initial stimulus for *Fiddler on the Roof* is attributed to a painting by Marc Chagall (born Born Movsha Shagal) variously entitled *The Fiddler* or *Fiddler on the Roof* (1912). The musician portrayed in this picture wears a long coat and a hat, a costume only faintly reminiscent of the ‘pseudo-shtetl’ attire associated with the Bock/Harnick/Stein musical.



Figure 18 *Topol as Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof*

The three components of cloth Greek fisherman's cap, Hessian collarless shirt and patterned waistcoat are integral to this look. It is not unusual to find musicians playing upon these stereotypes when appealing to a wide or uninformed audience. This type of look is likely to work well in the bottom left of the Real Deal graph. Such a costume is likely to look out of place where an audience is aware of such stereotypes. This is particularly true of many London Jewish celebratory events, or *simchas*, where Israeli music is given priority over Ashkenazi traditions that are seen as representative of the 'old country' (see Smootha, 1978, pp.151-182). It appears to be the case at such events that Eastern European music (embodied in klezmer) is often included as a token gesture that is often subservient to Israeli music. It is much more likely that the musicians will dress formally, or in a culturally neutral way, for an event taking place in the top right of the Real Deal graph:

People who play reggae wear Rasta hats and that kind of thing. But I see what we do – we are kind of providing a service and as such, I perceive that what people want from us is to look really bloody smart...

One of the things we often think about is that people talk about authenticity. I think at a wedding, they are not necessarily after that. They are after that service [we were] talking about. But what's funny about that is, if you look 200 years ago, to the way people saw musicians – I'd have thought, although we might look at these shtetl musicians as being unkempt and wearing straggly clothes. They probably tried to look as smart as they possibly, feasibly manage to look. They probably wore the equivalent of what we now wear as tuxedos, because they didn't want to be thrown out as being good for nothing musicians, so they wanted to be as smart as possible.

Initially, I assumed that there might be a difference between background music (where dress may also be functional) and foreground music (where Real Deal credentials may be more of an issue). It seems more likely that the difference between background and foreground music may lie in sensibilities to stereotypes. Quite often, a klezmer band will be booked for a non-Jewish wedding simply because the couple recognise the appeal and energy of a klezmer band. I have played at weddings where neither the bride nor groom were Jewish, yet the music, dancing and even the lifting of the groom on a chair were in keeping with a Jewish wedding, albeit a more Eastern European flavoured one. The event could, therefore, be seen as a Jewish-themed wedding. This may also be the case for a secular Jewish wedding. As one musician articulated:

But for most Jewish weddings these days, it's not necessarily a religious wedding. Like for a lot of non-Jewish weddings in this country there are civil ceremonies and they're out in the sticks and they are just parties and there is nothing religious about them and the same with the Jewish wedding. It's just that a lot of people feel like they want part of their culture to still be there. So, they book a Jewish band.

At such weddings, there are likely to be a large number of non-Jewish guests who may not take offense at the stereotypes implied in *Fiddler on the Roof* style costumes. At such events, brightly-coloured Gypsy-style clothing may also work well, as this also suggests Eastern Europe.



## Dressing Rumpelstiltschein

The JMI organised a large-scale event celebrating Jewish Culture in 2008 called *Simcha on the Square*. The event took place at Trafalgar Square and the website slogan was ‘Makes you feel proud to be Jewish’.<sup>74</sup> Such events provide an excellent platform for studying what might constitute *Jewish* music, at least on the part of the sponsors.<sup>75</sup> The event also serves to positively reinforce the identity of those who self-identify as Jewish. Several prominent Jewish music bands performed on a large stage to the general public. In 2008, She’koyokh accompanied Hopkele Productions who led dancing with a large crowd. I played double bass with She’koyokh.

I was also asked if I might be able to provide a stilt-walking band for the event, strolling around the crowd in between the acts playing ‘Jewish’ music. I felt confident that I would be able to select suitable repertoire and we played tunes such as *Hava Nagila* and *Siman Tov* as well as well-known Yiddish songs such as *Yiddishe Mama* and *Papirosen*. The instrumentation comprised an accordion, a soprano saxophone (louder than a clarinet), helicon tuba and marching drums. Out of necessity, I selected musicians who could walk on stilts and, with the exception of the tuba player, they had little familiarity with the musical material.

Clearly, the event was not a ‘function’ in the same category as a wedding or a barmitzvah; rather, it was aimed at promoting Jewish music to the widest possible audience. I discussed with the organisers, the JMI, what kind of costume we should wear. Initially, it was proposed that we should wear the black formal attire, fedora hats and *peyot* ringlets of the Hassidic Jews that are mostly found residing in the Stamford Hill area of London. I made provisional enquiries and discovered that it is possible to buy a fedora-style hat with *peyote*:

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.simchaonthesquare.org.uk/> accessed online 10 June 2010.

<sup>75</sup> As well as the Jewish Music Institute (JMI), other large sponsors include the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) as well as the larger Jewish press organisations.





Figure 19 *Felt Rabbi hat* accessed online 27 May 2010  
[http://www.shop4fancydress.com/store/hats/felt-rabbi-hat/prod\\_1807.html](http://www.shop4fancydress.com/store/hats/felt-rabbi-hat/prod_1807.html)

After further discussion, it was decided that this might be too culturally sensitive as an approach and that a more ‘Fiddler’ style would be more appropriate. After some research, we settled on black trousers, collarless shirts and ‘rustic’ waistcoats. I struggled to find Greek fishermen’s cloth caps exactly like the type used in *Fiddler on the Roof* and had to substitute them with the very similar Breton caps that are made of corduroy. Our final costume looked like this:<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The drummer was not able to make the photoshoot, but was dressed in a similar style.



Figure 20 *Rumpelstiltskin* publicity shot

In keeping with *Fiddler on the Roof*, I made *tzitzit* from some string and attached it to the base of our shirts, representing the tassels that extend from the *talit* prayer shawl. In this case, it represented a *talit katan*, which is an undergarment worn all day by observant Jewish men. Strictly, the Torah<sup>77</sup> requires *tzitzit* to be present on a four-cornered garment and so, in our case, this was purely stage dress. Our costumes largely made use of cultural stereotypes of heritage based on a Hollywood movie. We had also included a marker of religion and, whilst this was a religion we were representing, it was not one to which any of the band belonged. We were maintaining a level of authenticity in order that we might seem the Real Deal to the majority of the audience on the day, which consisted of several thousand people. However, we could not maintain our authenticity of self and, even if we performed with panache, we were still acting and lacked sincerity.

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<sup>77</sup> Deuteronomy 22:12.

I was asked by one woman in the audience if any members of the band were Jewish. I remarked that none of us were and I felt obliged to justify our performance by mentioning that we had all taken time to study the music and enjoyed playing it. This was not the case for the saxophonist and the drummer, although they clearly enjoyed the event. It is often difficult to gauge reactions of audience members, but I distinctly remember that she replied 'I see'. The fact that I felt the need to justify myself is, perhaps, testament to my own anxiety, which may contribute on one level to my ineffectiveness to provide a Real Deal performance. I suspect that we were perceived as the Real Deal by the majority of the audience, but some people familiar with Jewish culture and customs may have found our portrayal a little clichéd, such as that one particular woman.

### **The Kippah/Yarmulke**

The *kippah*<sup>78</sup> is the small skull cap traditionally worn by observant Jewish men at all times. In Yiddish, it is called a *yarmulke*, coming from the Polish word *jarmulka* meaning 'cap'. Whilst the majority of secular Jewish men do not wear a *kippah* for everyday attire, it is often customary to wear one whilst attending synagogue or at religious/cultural events such as weddings and *bar/bat mitzvahs*. This can present a dilemma for musicians, both Jewish and non-Jewish: should the musicians wear a *kippah* whilst working at an event, where the male members of the audience do not wear it? This can add to the confusion on the part of the audience as to whether members of the band are Jewish or not. This also reflects local sensibilities inasmuch as it is not always clear in London when wearing a *kippah* is required. It may also make non-Jewish musicians feel uncomfortable representing something they feel that perhaps they should not. As one non-Jewish musician articulated:

No, I made a definite conscious decision when I started doing this that the moment you try and pretend, is your complete undoing because of course, all it takes is one question of 'are you Jewish?' and then you have to say 'no', looking

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<sup>78</sup> Pl. *Kippot* sometimes called a skullcap or *kappel*.

like an idiot, because you've worn something that perhaps isn't appropriate. So, wearing a *yarmulke* when you don't have to, if you're not Jewish is ridiculous.

Some musicians wear other head coverings such as hats, but mostly trilbies. One Jewish musician told his non-Jewish colleague to wear a hat because it 'made him look more Jewish'. Frank London of the Klezmatics and current programme director of KlezFest London is more often than not seen wearing a *taqiyah* or Muslim prayer hat, or similar headwear.<sup>79</sup> This is often to obviate wearing a *kippah* when one might be expected. Another Jewish musician felt that a *kippah* was not necessary 'unless you are in a synagogue. If you are in a klezmer band, it's passing yourself off to be someone else'. One non-Jewish musician found that, because he used to wear a bandana, he did not feel compelled to wear a *kippah*. Often at a wedding or a barmitzvah, *kippot* are distributed to male members of the congregation and the musicians and they are often emblazoned with the name of the couple or the barmitzvah boy. I have certainly taken to carrying one in my dinner jacket pocket. Whilst sound engineering for a cantor's concert in a large synagogue, I found myself positioned right in the middle of the large sanctuary hall with people looking down from the balcony at me. Fortunately, one of the crew working on the concert had a spare *kippah* and was able to give it to me.

Eminent clarinetist Merlin Shepherd comments on an online article how klezmer provided a bridge between the sacred and the secular:

'Klezmer music is very interesting for me; it is a stepping stone between the sacred and secular.' Worshipping in Judaism is generally through song, and while the main elements of the klezmer cannon [*sic.*] have grown from these traditional prayer melodies, instruments were never part of worship in the orthodox synagogue. So the genre today has brought sacred music to a popular market through the medium of instruments. This 'stepping stone' is what drew Merlin to klezmer; 'I never felt that I belonged religiously to Judaism,' he says, 'but there was something that I did belong to, and playing Jewish music certainly helps me identify with this in many ways. It is the best of both worlds.'

(Haughton, 2010)

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<sup>79</sup> The first several pages of a Google image search for 'Frank London' all show him wearing a hat.

It is not uncommon for Jewish musicians to become more religious as a consequence of playing klezmer. As well as becoming more involved in the activities of their local synagogue, this may extend to wearing a *kippah*, as is the case with notable klezmer musicians Andy Statman and Goria Feidman. For some musicians, this may disturb the delicate secular/sacred balance that exists in klezmer. Many Jewish musicians are keen to remain ‘culturally Jewish’. As one musician explained to me:

I said I was culturally Jewish, not a cultural Jew, I think. ... It means I appreciate things like festivals, music, politics, but I don't feel I have to identify with the religion in order to be Jewish.

For some Jewish musicians, however, this may have a bearing on the way they dress. As one musician said about another (both Jewish):

He went through a phase of wearing *kippah* and *tzitzit*... but for him it was a costume. For him it was a way of getting authenticity, but for most Jews, from what I can understand and the people I know, most of the people playing klezmer music that I know who are Jewish, are from a very secular background and they are using the music to draw them back into the world of their origin to find out who they are.

In terms of Real Deal credentials, it would seem that a Jewish musician may wear a *kippah* at a gig situated anywhere on the graph. A non-Jewish musician may, of course, wear one, but is likely to be derided if it is discovered that he is not Jewish and was not obliged to wear one (such as in a synagogue).<sup>80</sup> This would appear to be the case with all religious symbolic clothing, such as the *tallit*. Of course, this does not give a Jewish musician license to have reduced sensitivity with regard to religious dress. Guber (2002) directs a great deal of attention towards the Italian Jewish performer Moni Ovadia, whom she puts forward as exhibiting ‘virtual Jewishness’:

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<sup>80</sup> The West London Synagogue provides a small number of *kippot* near the entrance to the main sanctuary in order that all male heads be covered.

Onstage, he frequently wears a long coat, battered hat, and tiny wire-rim glasses – conventionalized costume props used for more than a century to perform ‘the Jew’.

(Gruber, 2002, p.63)

In a similar vein, it is difficult to ignore the disdain that Mark Slobin exhibits in the following encounter:

It was at a 1997 Ovadia concert in Bologna that I had a moment of epiphany about klezmer’s voyage into uncharted waters. ... As Ovadia went into his recitation of the Hebrew prayer for the dead, ‘El mole rakhamim,’ my vision turned to anger. The last time I had heard this prayer was three months back at my father’s funeral. Now Ovadia was chanting it on stage and, in the middle, realizing he had forgotten something, was fumbling into his pocket to find the *yarmulke*, the required hat for prayers, and to slap it onto his head.

(Slobin, 2000a, p.87)

Other, more subtle, symbolic items such as the Star of David, which may be worn as items of jewellery, may stimulate a person’s *jewdar* but may not be obvious or even visible. It would seem that the Star of David has become a more potent Zionist symbol rather than a simple marker of one’s Jewishness. Gruber mentions how:

In other cases, they [non-Jews] create their own realities that perpetuate an image of Jewish presence. Some go so far as to wear Stars of David around their necks, assume Jewish-sounding names, attend synagogue, send their children to Jewish schools, and follow kosher dietary laws, in addition to championing Jewish causes. Sometimes non-Jews consciously underscore the irony of their outsider status: local non-Jewish klezmer groups in Austria and the Netherlands punningly call themselves by the Yiddish name *Gojim* (Gentiles). Another, in Bremen, Germany, takes the pun a step further, calling itself the *Klezgoyim*.

(2002, p.11)

### **The *Shabbes Goy* musician**

In March 2010, I was contacted by the JMI who enquired whether I might be able to play the *shofar*<sup>81</sup> for the funeral of an African Christian man. It is not uncommon for the *shofar* to be sounded at funerals, particularly within the African Pentecostal tradition. At

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<sup>81</sup> Horn of the ram, or kudu, sounded at the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

the time of the initial phone call, I was familiar with what a *shofar* was but had never played one and was not familiar with the repertoire. I was contacted by the JMI because they could not be seen to send a Jewish musician to a Christian church to perform on what is considered a sacred<sup>82</sup> instrument, with specific religious meaning. As I have a background in playing various brass instruments, I agreed to do it. This was partly to help the JMI, who would receive a percentage of the fee, as well as to help the family who were struggling to find a suitable musician, but also to satisfy my own curiosity.

I was able to purchase a Yemenite *shofar*, which I selected as it is much longer than the ram's horn and appeared to be a more popular choice, no doubt due to the visual appeal and possibly because of the African connection.<sup>83</sup> Fortunately, I was able to source an instrument for £59, making the venture financially worthwhile. As there seemed to be an uncertainty as to the exact repertoire, I decided to learn the three-part *shofar* call used in the Jewish tradition at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.<sup>84</sup> Each of the sections has a symbolic meaning within Judaism that is largely not applicable to Christianity. It appeared that I was at liberty to perform whatever I deemed appropriate. In the absence of any other material, I decided to perform the traditional Jewish calls, which last less than a minute.

I was acutely aware that, as the client had found me through the JMI, she might have assumed I was Jewish. Whilst I was conscious not to deny it, I was also aware that a certain ambivalence might be easier. I discussed the structure of the events via email and some telephone conversations. There was to be a service on the Thursday night followed by the actual funeral on the Friday morning. I also played the last post on the trumpet. It was decided that, while some of the children were reading from the scripture, I would walk to the front playing the *shofar*. The exact text was:

30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the

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<sup>82</sup> It must come from a *kosher* animal.

<sup>83</sup> The kudu is an African antelope.

<sup>84</sup> There are ample resources and tutorials on <http://www.youtube.com/>

clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

(King James Bible, Matthew 24)

As the line ‘they shall see the Son of man’ was read out, I came forward and began playing. I was aware that a musician with religious conviction might have a problem with this.

I also received an email asking ‘will you be wearing a *tallit* when blowing the *shofar*? That would be really nice.’<sup>85</sup> This confirmed that she most likely understood me to be Jewish and that I would have a *tallit* as it is a requirement of the religion. I simply replied that I would be wearing a black suit, white shirt and a black tie and I hoped this would be OK. She replied that it would be.

This rather curious and unusual situation put me in the position of representing Judaism, in particular the JMI, although I could not lay claim to being Jewish. Parallels can be drawn here with Gruber’s (2002) work on being ‘virtually’ Jewish in Europe. She describes how the Kraków Festival of Jewish Culture has been run by a non-Jewish Polish man, Janusz Makuch. It is interesting to read how Makuch feels he is representing, even serving, the larger Jewish community and how Gruber suspects he might be misguided:

Indeed, Makuch feels that he is doing what a Jew – what he – would call a *mitzvah*, a good deed that is also a God-given commandment: ‘people sometimes say this is a Jewish culture festival, so it should be organized by Jewish people. But in every Jewish shtetl there was a *shammas*. Why? You know why. Because on *shabbes*, someone has to turn on the light, for instance. OK, I’m a *shammas*.’ (In the traditional hierarchy of the shtetl community, however, the *shammas*, or *shammash*, the salaried sexton of the community or congregation, was always a Jew. The Yiddish expression Makuch meant was ‘*shabbes goy*’.)

(Gruber, 2002, p.47)

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<sup>85</sup> Email correspondence 17 March 2010.



Whilst my motives differed from those of Makuch, I didn't feel I was carrying out a *mitzvah*. Rather, I did feel like a *shabbes* goy by undertaking work that a Jewish musician ought not to be seen doing. Personally, I appreciated the work and it was interesting and challenging to carry out.

I have also experienced parallels with the organisation of the Kraków Festival of Jewish Culture and the Cork Festival of Jewish Culture. In 2008, I was invited by the organiser, Janusz Flakus, a Polish student at the University, to guest as Ud soloist with the 'Festival Ensemble'.<sup>86</sup> Flakus comes from a Catholic background and is very enthusiastic about Jewish vocal music and, although he has limited comprehension of the languages, sings in Yiddish and Ladino and attended KlezFest London 2007, where we met. Other notable bands at the festival were London-based Klezmer Klub and Dublin-based Yurody, with whom I have performed in the past.<sup>87</sup>

What was particularly interesting about the festival was that Cork appears to have a small Jewish community and much seemed to be made of the small Jewish connections. For example, there was a talk given by Professor Dermot Keogh of Cork University and a screening of a documentary film entitled *Shalom Ireland* (2003), which told the story of how Irish Jews participated in the creation and development of both Ireland and Israel. Much was made of the contribution of Gerald Yael Goldberg, of Lithuanian Jewish descent, who became Lord Mayor of Cork in 1977. Apart from some of the performers, I was unable to find any participants who self-identified themselves as Jewish.

Once again, I found myself in a strange situation where I felt some people thought I might be Jewish. I had been invited because of my involvement with KlezFest London to be an example of Jewish culture and I was conscious that the other non-Jewish musicians may be looking at me to model this for them. This proved problematic, if only for the fact that the musical material was diverse, drawing on the varied Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions.

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<sup>86</sup> Sunday, 19 October 2008.

<sup>87</sup> At Dublin KlezFest 2008 and 2009.

After the evening concert, Flakus led the crowd in vigorous Hassidic-style dancing, culminating in his being lifted up on a chair *barmitzvah* style:



Figure 21 *Janusz Flakus at the Cork Festival of Jewish Culture 2008 (image removed)*

Everyone undeniably had a good time, engaging in what they saw as Jewish Culture. I was aware that the audience may have been curious as to which of the performers were Jewish or not. Although Klezmer Klub performed on the Saturday night before I arrived,<sup>88</sup> I was interested to find a picture of the Yiddish singer Vivi Lachs dressed as a Hassidic man conforming to the broadest of Jewish stereotypes and wearing a similar style costume to the one I outlined above, but which was rejected by the JMI for being possibly offensive:

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<sup>88</sup> It is perhaps significant that the event avoided Friday night (*shabbes*), despite the fact that this would not have been an issue for any of the performers or audience.



Figure 22 *Klezmer Klub at the Cork Festival of Jewish Culture 2008 (image removed)*

It is perhaps an obvious statement, but only those musicians who self-identify as being Jewish can get away with such self-deprecation.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, they are likely to be seen as Jewish by the audience. Any attempt for a non-Jew to behave in such a manner could potentially be seen as offensive.

### **The Jewish Joke**

I argue that it is possible to see the Hassidic-style beard and hat worn by Lachs at the Cork festival as a light-hearted joke because the audience understands her to be Jewish. This may be down to any number of factors outlined above, such as her name, the music she sings and even the way she looks in relation to preconceived stereotypes. I propose that her use of humour at the expense of Jews can only but affirm the audience's

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<sup>89</sup> Although a devout Hassidic man would object on the grounds that the vocalist is female.

perception of her Jewishness; only a musician who self-identifies as being Jewish would dare to self-deprecate in such a way.<sup>90</sup>

The Zionist *Hagshama*<sup>91</sup> group's website has an interesting article on 'why Jews laugh at themselves' (Halkin, 2006). The article points to Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), where the subject of Jewish jokes is discussed. It is perhaps more interesting to see Halkin's initial analysis of Freud:

The primary thrust of the humor is directed not, as in most jokes, aggressively or mockingly against the Other but rather against one's own group, that is, against the Jews themselves. Moreover, such a joke is truly Jewish only when its Jewish teller identifies with this group. If mechanically repeated by a Gentile or an assimilated Jew, it would no longer be the same joke.

It can be argued, that by telling such a joke, it is possible to affirm Real Deal credentials with the audience if they suspect the musician to be Jewish. This is clearly a dangerous game to play if you cannot lay claim to being Jewish. There is strong potential for causing offence to those who self-identify as being Jewish, but perhaps even more to those who don't. This is similar to the way in which African Americans may refer to each other as 'niggas'. For other groups to refer to them using the same term, it is considered racist (see Taylor, 1999; Asim, 2007). Gruber mentions how the Italian singer/actor Moni Ovadia uses this type of humour in his stage shows:

In 1998 he told an audience at the Rome Jewish Community Center that he realized many of the jokes he uses onstage could sound ant-Semitic if told by a non-Jew. He did not, however, address the question of whether in telling such jokes before mainly non-Jewish audiences he, a Jew, could give the appearance of sanctioning or legitimizing such descriptions in the mainstream. 'The merit of my success,' Ovadia has said, 'is in fact that I simultaneously satisfy vast categories of people: Jews who love to laugh at themselves; those who feel a sense of guilt for that which happened and finally can laugh at Jews along with a Jew; anti-Semites who see their stereotypes confirmed.'

(Gruber, 2002, p.66)

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<sup>90</sup> Although, see Garber (2008, p.210-211) for a discussion of Boy George and even Madonna dressing up as a Hassidic men.

<sup>91</sup> Lit. fulfilment in modern Hebrew.

This does seem to be a rather curious approach; yet, on one level, it shows that Ovadia is pandering to what he feels are his audience's expectations of the Real Deal. Indeed, as Gruber points out a few pages earlier, 'Ovadia was [probably] the only Jew they had ever knowingly encountered first-hand; his persona represented the closest they had knowingly come to the "real thing".' (*ibid.*, p.64). This certainly allows him licence to claim he is the Real Deal and, in the absence of anything suggesting otherwise, his claim is self-legitimised.

I have found telling a Jewish joke around Jewish musicians to be an interesting experience. As an informal experiment, I have been telling one Jewish joke over the past few years to a number of people with whom I work and also with various organisers and facilitators on the music scene in London. I first heard the joke from a Jewish musician and it goes something like this:

A Jewish boy comes home from school and tells his mother he's been given a part in the school play. 'Wonderful? What part is it?' asks the mother. The boy says, 'I play the part of the Jewish husband.' The mother scowls and says, 'You go back and tell the teacher you want a speaking part.'

(Accessed online at  
[http://www.sillymusic.com/jewish\\_jokes\\_one\\_liners.asp](http://www.sillymusic.com/jewish_jokes_one_liners.asp)  
17 December 2011)

I make an effort to feign a stereotypical London Jewish accent for the mother. Of course, the reception to my jokes depends on the affability of the listener, but I have found the light stereotyping in the above joke to be acceptable. If anything, it appears to affirm my awareness of these cultural issues with a Jewish audience and I may follow it with some anecdotes about my experiences with forceful Jewish mothers when teaching in a Jewish secondary school. What is particularly interesting to me is how people wait with baited breath whilst I tell the joke. It is likely that people may judge my understanding of Jewish culture on such small talk, although I am aware that, as I am not Jewish, I may have a heightened sensitivity to this.

This leads on to questions of authority: if the joke is deemed funny by a Jewish audience, then it is validated for others. I pointed to this in Chapter Two with reference to Tim Rice's experience with the gaida pipes. A similar principle applies to jewdar whereby validation by other Jewish musicians is important. As two non-Jewish musicians articulate:

It's like learning a language. If you learnt Yiddish to the extent that someone said 'Oh, you must be Yiddish'<sup>92</sup> then surely that would be a compliment to your ability to learn Yiddish? It's like learning klezmer [violin] – if eventually someone thinks you are Jewish when you play it, then that's the same thing, isn't it?

It's a compliment because that's what I'm trying to do.

Whilst I suspect few would question the authority and subsequent empowerment of a native speaker to judge, the case of klezmer is less simple. As established,<sup>93</sup> many Jews have not grown up listening to klezmer and, partly as a result of the Israeli repression of Ashkenazi traditions, many Jews are unfamiliar with the style. I will discuss issues of authority in the next chapter, but it is interesting to note the extent to which telling a Jewish joke (or not) may affect a musician's Real Deal credentials.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst the concept and application of jewdar is initially seen as a bit of fun for the musicians with whom I spoke, it reveals a great deal about how musicians think about their own appearance on stage and in marketing. An awareness of stereotypes would appear to be useful, as is sensitivity to their appropriateness. Due in large part to an increase in political correctness there is a greater use of subjectivity with regard to cultural identification by physical appearance - using the eyes, for example.

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<sup>92</sup> In this case, I assume the literal meaning of 'Jewish' is meant, rather than referring to, the language.

<sup>93</sup> See Chapter Three, page 86.

What is identified as 'Jewish' varies greatly, although there seems to be some consensus, as demonstrated in the criteria for citizenship in Israel, about who is a Jew. The stereotypes that developed with mass media suggest that some musicians look for answers about their heritage. Discussions of supposed Ashkenazi Khazarian heritage highlight sensitivities to this. It would seem that the dynamics are broadly different in the diaspora and in Israel. Audiences, particularly Jewish, do appear to be interested in whether or not musicians are Jewish. In this particular case, this is the main marker of whether they are the Real Deal or not. The notion of jewdar is important to musicians, particularly Jewish musicians, and complements the Real Deal line that is central to the graph.

In the next chapter, I further develop how being Jewish has the potential to empower musicians. I also look at how money is earned by teaching and promoting Jewish music in London and who dictates, moderates and controls this.

## Chapter Four

### ***Olmaz*: it just isn't done**

There is a dilemma that perhaps every performer of World Music will face at some point. Without having grown up surrounded by the culture whose music they play, there is an inevitability that gaps in knowledge will exist. An example of this might be the theme tune to a children's television programme which may be familiar to a musician from a certain culture, yet completely unfamiliar to an outside performer who may have to consciously learn such music rather than absorb it as part of their upbringing. This chapter examines how this may empower musicians who can lay claim to being the Real Deal. It may also become a source of tension and frustration between musicians, particularly those who demonstrate familiarity with style yet may not have grown up with the associated culture or cannot lay claim to the heritage.

*Olmaz* is a Turkish word meaning 'it can't be' being the negative of the verb *olmak* 'to be'. This term has become useful to me as an umbrella term to represent empowerment on the part of musicians from a particular culture. It is being used to represent 'just knowing' something on account of cultural experience, or perhaps heritage without further justification. It may be paraphrased as 'you don't do it because you just don't'. This lack of understanding has the potential to cause frustration in those who did not grow up in a culture they are now studying, or who cannot lay claim to the heritage. I was particularly interested to discuss this with musicians, as it was not only something I have encountered but a potential source of tension between musicians.

I shall examine the significance of klezmer as 'heritage' music and explore the potential disparity between upbringing and heritage. I look at the dissemination of klezmer music: which musicians teach the conventions and what are the modes of transmission? I consider the importance of this in shaping perceptions of the Real Deal and suggest that this may be self-perpetuating. I assess the importance of the JMI's annual KlezFest at which I taught for four years. I also survey the repertory that shapes the scene that I have



been studying: who controls and shapes the style? Finally, I look at the notion of ‘policing’ a style to see if a link exists between being perceived as the Real Deal and shaping and maintaining these perceptions as a matter of self-interest. Conversely, those who cannot lay claim to being the Real Deal may face a range of issues with regard to transmission and representation of the style, particularly whilst teaching.

### **Taking ownership of klezmer as Jewish music**

As Slobin (2000a) has articulated, klezmer is seen as a heritage music and that heritage is seen by many as undeniably Jewish. The very fact that the JMI supports and acts as the hub of klezmer in the UK is testament to this and, as outlined in the introduction, a comprehensive definition of what constitutes Jewish music falls outside the scope of this study. What is more important is that the JMI clearly feels klezmer *is* Jewish music. Slobin usefully refers to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) in offering a definition of heritage music:

I use the term ‘heritage music’ to distinguish between music that is part and parcel of a way of life [here is where we miss the word ‘traditional’] and music that has been singled out for preservation, protection, enshrinement, and revival – in a word, heritage music.

(in Slobin, 2000a, pp.12-13)

Two words in this quote have possessive resonance: ‘protection’ and enshrinement’. This begs several questions. One might ask: ‘protection’ from/for whom and ‘enshrinement’ for what? Could it be that those seen as external to the culture may threaten the purity and, perhaps, integrity of the music, thus necessitating a need for protection? What shape and form might this protection take and who is charged with enforcing it? Although less provocative, the suggestion that the music be enshrined suggests an analogy between music and religion.<sup>94</sup> As a problematic analogy for a style of music such as klezmer that is inextricably linked to Judaism, the links are worth exploring as communities can be built through both. Is the music to be ‘worshipped’ by some and why? How and in what shape might this be embodied? In the case of a ‘shrine’, this would have to be something

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<sup>94</sup> Also developed as part of *Kunstreligion* discourse, see Auerochs (2006).

material such as a recording or sheet music. Whilst, as in the case of shrines, the aesthetics of the material form may have an attraction for people, there is a need to promote and make people aware of them. This promotion of certain material, based on its supposed importance to the preservation of heritage, can be likened to a museum or a memorial, played out across the global klezmer scene. Edward Linenthal has commented on this in terms of creating and shaping an authentic identity:

Memorials are a product of who we are right now. We are a people negotiating our identities ... In part, we are doing this by creating and feeling the power of memorials. There is likely to be a negotiation of power in this process.  
(in Rosenblatt, 2000, p.30)

Klezmer as a modern style came to London largely from the USA, where the late twentieth-century movement to revitalise and/or reconstruct<sup>95</sup> the music of Eastern European immigrants came to New York around the turn of the twentieth century. The overwhelming majority of these immigrants were Jewish, as were the musicians spearheading the revival.

Whilst busy performing on the Appalachian music scene, the founder of KlezKamp, Henry ‘Hank’ Sapoznik, was asked in 1977 by fiddler Tommy Jarrell ‘Hank, don’t your people got none of your own music?’ (Sapoznik, 1987, p.15).<sup>96</sup> It could be argued that much of the modern klezmer revival stems from Sapoznik’s search for his ‘own’ music. Intentional or not, Sapoznik is claiming ownership of the music he has spent the larger part of his life researching and reviving.

Undeniably and inevitably, the modern constructed style of klezmer has been popularised and disseminated mainly by musicians who self-identify as Jewish and, by many definitions, this makes the style Jewish. However, the Eastern European origins of klezmer are not exclusively Jewish (see Feldman, 1994). The abundance of titles such as *Araber Tanz* and the *Terk in America* points rather obviously to this. Consequently,

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<sup>95</sup> Often called the ‘revival’, as demonstrated by the CD *The Rough Guide to Klezmer Revival* and chapter three in Rogovoy (2000) called ‘revival’.

<sup>96</sup> This story is also recounted in *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle* January 28 2009.

musicians who do not self-identify as Jewish are keen to highlight these non-Jewish links with a similar conviction as Jewish musicians assert their part in the development of the music. There exists a trend in literature as well as most other art forms towards romanticising the *shtetl*. This serves to make the Jewish claim to the music seem not only more attractive and probable but also coherent to musicians. As Roskies points out:

At the creative heart of their cultural code lay the evolving image of the shtetl: as the ghetto-existence best left behind; as the Jewish body politic under siege; as the idealized *Heimat*, the local Old Country homeland, arrested in time; as paradise lost; and finally as the staging ground for Jewish mass martyrdom.

(1999, p.43)

It has been pointed out by a number of Jewish musicians who shun such overly simplistic projections of the *shtetl* (see Katz, 2009; Polonsky, 2004; Estraiikh and Krutikov, 2000) that the majority of Jews lived in the larger urban centres of the Pale of Settlement where, for obvious reasons, they stood a better chance of making more money. A similar pattern can be seen in the same geographical areas today, where Ukrainian nationalism makes much of village life in projections of nostalgia (see Slobin, 1996, p.33). One does not have to look too far in the Soviet past of Ukraine to reveal that rural life was not quite so idealistic. The harsher side of life in the *shtetl* is manifest in the broad rejection of much Ashkenazi culture in Israel as being from the ‘old country’ and serving to remind Israelis of a less successful past. There certainly exists this division within Judaism, as the following quote attests:

Progressive Jews, and even mainstream Jews, see the new Orthodox Establishment as obscurantist and ossified, reverting to old ways that should have been left in the ghetto and *shtetl*.

(Brook, 1989, p.163)

Conversely, there is appeal in the curiosity generated by the old-fashioned ways of the *hassidim* that dominate the Stamford Hill area of London. For musicians, the wordless *nigunim* may represent a deep spirituality that is appealing to many non-Jews; the wordlessness furthering their accessibility.

Nowhere is the glorification of the ‘old world’ more apparent than in *Fiddler on the Roof*, although there are more subtle examples such as the widely played *Heymisher Bulgar* (see Warembud, 1976, p.85), which originates not from Eastern Europe but from early twentieth-century American Yiddish opera. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, *Fiddler* has come to be the accepted stereotype of Jewishness (as opposed to Judaism) in the modern world.

Bohlman has pointed to the fact that this ‘idealisation’ of the *shtetl* emerged during the nineteenth century:

That image grew from the music of the wedding and the music of the small shopkeeper. It contained the folk music that emphasized rites of passage and the klezmer music that reproduced the shtetl through rituals of reproduction themselves, notably the wedding.

(Bohlman, 2008, pp.67-68)

The word *klezmer*<sup>97</sup> was originally used in Yiddish for a musician and the term only became associated with a style as part of the revival. The repertoire played at celebrations in Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century was most likely a mixture of a number of local styles, perhaps owing most to Romanian music. As Sapoznik admits:

But with no written record of early Klezmer, we haven’t a clue to the original use of such ornaments or, in fact, to how the music sounded overall.

(1999, p.9)

This is not to suggest that there was not, and is not, an identifiable religiously Jewish element to this music, as music was played for ceremonial purposes such as *tsu der khupe* [lit: to the wedding canopy]. Other non-Jewish musicians would have performed alongside Jewish musicians as need dictated, much as is the case today. I argue that the modern style of klezmer has become appropriated as uniquely Jewish, and more as a result of its dissemination than its actual origins. This is compounded by early twentieth-century recordings made in Eastern Europe, largely for an American Jewish audience yearning for music from back home. A notable example of this is Belf’s Romanian

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<sup>97</sup> From the Hebrew *Kley-zemer* lit: vessel of music.

Orchestra, who recorded at least 60 pieces for the Syrena record company during the period 1912-14. The majority of the pieces on these records, which have been restored and reissued<sup>98</sup> digitally, form a large part of the modern klezmer repertoire and have been used to construct what could be referred to as a 'traditional' Jewish klezmer style. This is problematic, as Reid (2007) confesses:

I also have no information as to Belf, should he or his orchestra existed as anything other than a brand name for the studio band. The name Belf - which anglicizes as 'Wolff' - wasn't uncommon in the Western Ukrainian areas that the music is associated with.

(accessed online 15 July 2010  
<http://belfology.com/notes/SirenaStory.html> )

The quality of the recorded performances is questionable, with glaring errors such as musicians apparently missing repeats. There is also some doubt as to whether any of the musicians might have been Jewish, as it is likely that generic session musicians would have been used.

Later recordings made in the USA around the 1920s by Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras are more identifiable as being performed by Jewish musicians, although how true they remained to the music they played in Eastern Europe is contentious, particularly with a force of other new stylistic influences such as jazz. Such was the transformation of the style that the majority of 'Jewish' music was dominated by the *bulgar* dance form at the expense of many other forms (see Feldman, 1994). One musician articulated this to me:

They created this reconstructed sort of genre that they thought vaguely resembled what it may have sounded like in the shtetl and they said this is how you've got to learn it. You got to listen to these old recordings of Brandwein and Tarras and you've got to mimic them.

This will be examined in more detail below, but there exist a number of these early recordings which have become 'enshrined' by the JMI (directly or indirectly). This

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<sup>98</sup> To date, this has only been done privately by notable Klezmer clarinetist Kurt Bjorling.

contributes to the pervasive belief that klezmer is a heritage music. Herein, therefore, lies the dilemma: the roots of klezmer are seen as Jewish, but it is more probable that the modern style is a Jewish American interpretation of a more diverse and general collection of Eastern European styles. When klezmer is seen as modern heritage music, this presents problems with regard to identity and ownership. This confusion was articulated (in a rather convoluted manner) by one Jewish musician:

The question is: at what point can you ever say this is authentic, this isn't authentic because Jewishness, because we come from and we draw our music, if we talk specifically about musicality, forget the religious stuff, but if we draw on our musicality from... if we are talking specifically about music, it's come from a variety of sources anyway. There is no original starting point for anything.

### **Who can lay claim to this music?**

As klezmer is adopted as a uniquely Jewish music style by such organisations as the JMI, it is unsurprising that it may attract musicians self-identifying as Jewish who are searching for their 'roots'. The JMI is an institution which endeavours to represent all Jewish music. This is broadly divided into the following categories: Ashkenazi (including Klezmer<sup>99</sup> and Yiddish), synagogue music, Sephardi music, suppressed music, Israeli music and Western classical music. There is considerable overlap between some of these categories, particularly in the broader groupings such as Israeli music, which may encompass all of the other categories. There is potential, therefore, for klezmer in particular to attract large numbers of Jewish musicians with its strong emphasis on heritage. I was interested to hear the response of the director of the JMI, Geraldine Auerbach, in response to this:

And that's the whole thing about the Jewish Music Institute – it is a Jewish Music, Institute not a Jewish, music institute. It's not about Jews. It's not about Jews. We don't collect Jews, we don't look at who's performing it, or who composed it. We're looking at the content of the music itself. [PT: Right, but if audiences wanted a true, Jewish, authentic – in that real deal way...] Then they'd have to

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<sup>99</sup> It is given a capital K on the website.

ask for it. [PT: Would they expect it to be played by Jewish people, in the same way that if you wanted an authentic Italian coffee experience, you'd want it in Rome, served to you by an Italian man.] Yes, but you know that's not always possible. You know, you're not in Rome, you're sitting in London and you get the best coffee you can and I think it's fantastic that lots of people play it. It's great when there are some Jews in a band or one Jew in a band or – because I think that it's good for the Jew, you know? My main fear is where are the Jews? Why are they not doing this? And it's only people who are not Jewish actually showing them the way, because that's another whole story, because Jews perception of their own culture, you know – they cannot see it. It's like a hot potato, they can't hold it, they don't know how to deal with it, they don't know whether they should enjoy it or whether they should put it under the table.

As I mentioned above, some feel that Ashkenazi culture became less prevalent in Israel and the USA by the 1960s as it was representative of 'the old country' (Edelman, 2003, p.270) which may be one reason why some Jews neglect klezmer. The increasing popularity of klezmer in Israel has changed this view somewhat and the international klezmer festival in Safed<sup>100</sup> demonstrates this. It is no coincidence that the New York klezmer and Yiddish scene has a distinctly anti-Zionist angle, or at least an ambivalence, that has to some extent transferred to London (see Drache, 2005; Bard-Rosenberg, 2008). Interviewing the writer Tony Kushner,<sup>101</sup> Yale Strom highlights this point:

I think what I love of the culture of *klezmer* and the culture of Yiddish is its disloyalty to an idea of Jewish power as expressed in the State of Israel.

(Kushner in Strom, 2002, p.249)

This adoption of klezmer as a marker of 'Jewishness' is inherently problematic. The following reveals how the style is ripe for interpretation and liberal appropriation:

Even in the very surface, there is a problem with identifying contemporary 'Jewishness' with a musical style that, through the very fact that it is reviving something, simply doesn't belong to our own time. Old world klezmer had a long life, flourished, and died in a world alien to our own social reality.

(Bard-Rosenberg, 2008, p.24)

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<sup>100</sup> <http://www.safed.co.il/safed-music.html>

Accessed online 17 December 2011.

<sup>101</sup> On 18 January 2001.

Regardless of who claims klezmer as their own, I have already hinted that some feel there is a ‘Jewish’ element to the actual musical content that may be linked even subconsciously to heritage. Bohlman (2008) refers to ‘the Jewish question’ (p.182) with regard to Mahler’s music and how Max Brod (1884-1968) insisted that the composer’s music contained elements of Jewishness, however subconscious. This is a similar approach to that taken by Gottlieb (2004) whereby the influence of synagogue music is sought out. Sapoznik highlights this supposed tendency with regard to the development of stylistic elements:

Although we know which instruments klezmerim played, we know remarkably little about what the music sounded like. Clues can be heard in non-Jewish folk tunes still played throughout Eastern Europe and in the tradition of the *khazonim* (cantors) and their accompanying choirs of apprentices, *meshoyrerim*. Cantorial music, with its rich array of modes and vocalizations, lies at the very heart of what exemplifies the Klezmer sound and its ornament vocabulary.

(1999, pp.8-9)

Interestingly enough, much of the musical analysis that Gottlieb applies to Tin Pan Alley songs does not seem to resonate with my understanding of the stylistic traits of klezmer. The two most common modes used in the klezmer repertoire, *Ahava Raba* and *Misheberach*, are used significantly in synagogue cantorial chant. However, there exists a large amount of music outside klezmer that is not necessarily Jewish that uses both these modes and also in a similar manner.

Some of the ornaments used in klezmer, such as the *krekhtz* [lit: moan], have been likened to inflections in spoken Yiddish. Does this suggest, therefore, that a familiarity with Yiddish is likely to produce a more informed klezmer performance? Certainly, many of the world’s most famous klezmer performers do speak Yiddish, although the notable American Yiddishist Michael Alpert informed me that he felt there were no more than five musicians who spoke Yiddish as their mother tongue as part of the revival. I was particularly interested to hear Alpert talk about how an American band central to the revival, the *Klezmerim*, fronted by Lev Lieberman, developed and named some of these stylistic ornaments. He showed the group how singing ‘boi-tya’, shifting quickly between



head and chest voice, could be used to cultivate an effective, stylistically correct vocal inflection as utilised in the performance of *nigunim*.<sup>102</sup> Quite how this was devised would require more research, but it demonstrates how musicians have endeavoured to construct, refine and teach the style.

As part of my research, I have been casually learning Yiddish and, over the past few years, have sung Yiddish songs in public. I am acutely aware that not only are there a number of accents and dialects of Yiddish,<sup>103</sup> but there are seldom any Yiddish speakers in the audiences that I perform to. Am I, therefore, simply by singing in Yiddish, appearing to be more the Real Deal to the audience and my fellow musicians? I have taken the time to consult acknowledged experts in Yiddish<sup>104</sup> and attended a week-long course in Yiddish that included conversation as well as singing.<sup>105</sup> The quote from a non-Jewish musician that I used in Chapter Three would suggest this sincerity versus functionality is important:

It's like learning a language. If you learnt Yiddish to the extent that someone said 'Oh, you must be Yiddish' then surely that would be a compliment to your ability to learn Yiddish? It's like learning klezmer [violin] – if eventually someone thinks you are Jewish when you play it, then that's the same thing, isn't it?

I should point out that, although Yiddish essentially translates as Jewish, the two cannot be used interchangeably. Yiddish and *yiddishkeit* have strong inference to the 'old country' (see Edelman, 2003, p.270), whereas Jewish and Jewishness have a much broader meaning. The above sentiment was echoed by another, non-Jewish musician who, despite coming from a particular (in this case, non-Jewish) culture, does not feel she sings well in that language, even though the audience is mostly unaware:

I'll tell you something. I told you that I was originally [of a certain heritage] [PT: Yes.] But I don't think I can sing [those] songs very well. As well as the ... songs [in another language] I sing. Because my [command of the language] isn't that good and I realise the mistakes I make and that makes ... that holds me back a

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<sup>102</sup> In a workshop at Ot Azoy! 2010.

<sup>103</sup> *Litvish*, or eastern and western Yiddish, are the main two.

<sup>104</sup> Most notably Barry Davis.

<sup>105</sup> Ot Azoy 2010, as organised by the JMI.

little bit. [PT: You'd never tell that to an audience would you?] No, of course not, but I would know. I would realise my own mistakes and you know when you're ... when you do mistakes, it somehow ... audiences ... I think they realise, or the careful audience.

There is, therefore, an implied pressure on performers to perform in a language that they may be perceived to have ownership of, although they may struggle with it. This holds particularly true with those who self-identify as Jewish singing in Yiddish: if it fits the audience or fellow musicians' perceptions as being the Real Deal, then it will be acceptable. There is also a question of ownership here: a musician who self-identifies as Jewish will be accepted by the audience as the Real Deal when singing in Yiddish because there is ownership of the language, perhaps only assigned by the audience. An example of this was at an event as part of Jewish Book Week 2010 in London. Extracts from Jewish Polish texts were read by notable Jewish actors, and I directed and performed in the small band that played in between the readings and accompanied one Yiddish song *Rosjinkes mit Mandeln* (lit: Raisins and Almonds). I was impressed with how the actor in question performed the lullaby, conveying a good deal of what seemed appropriate emotion to the audience. I was suspicious of her pronunciation of the Yiddish text, however, and this was confirmed by a Yiddish scholar friend who was sitting in the audience. The fact remains that it was good enough for the vast majority of the audience (or so it seemed) and, therefore, the performer seemed the Real Deal. For those performers (such as myself) who were aware that the Yiddish was inaccurate, we were aware that we were not getting the Real Deal. However, a Jewish actor singing in Yiddish, although inaccurate, certainly seemed to be the Real Deal to most. Perhaps this suggests that there is a Real Deal 'threshold'. This raises an interesting question: was it convincing acting or the Jewish context that enhanced the Real Deal credentials? As one Jewish musician described another Jewish musician:

Yeah, I mean, he's not exactly the bee's knees when it comes to playing in the style. He just plays... he's a Jew and he gets away with it.

There is a difference between actors and musicians, whereby audiences are aware that an actor is endeavouring to portray something he may not be. Here there is a distinct

difference between instrumentalists and singers. The expectation of singers to also be actors is articulated by Wilson (1997):

As story-teller, it's your job to make me believe that story and care about its outcome. All those words transmit meanings, frequently at more than one level, and their significance will demand all your acting skills to interpret the lyric as a piece of spoken monologue. Performers who stop acting as soon as they start singing devalue both arts. The same factors which inform an actor's intelligent and emotionally truthful presentation of spoken text hold equally true of text that is sung.

(p.16)

The same cannot be said to be true when the audience does not understand the language being sung. However, in pop music in particular there has developed a trend for the lyrics to be a 'true' representation of the singer's life (see Yuval and Taylor, 2007, pp.101-133). Acting and general theatricality does, of course, exist in music as well and bands such as *3 Mustaphas 3* are a commercially successful example. However, particularly with regard to traditional and heritage music, there seems to be less of a tendency to appear to be acting, unless there is a comedic element in the approach.

### **KlezFest<sup>106</sup>**

Since 2000, the JMI has run an annual festival of Yiddish culture. This has mostly been spread over two weeks with the first week, called *Ot Azoy!* (lit: that's the way), dedicated to Yiddish language, while the second week, called KlezFest, focusing more on music and dance. In 2010, a two-week course called *Tumbala* was offered encompassing Yiddish language, as well as a music and dance element. KlezFest represents an important hub for the scene I have studied as it is the main method of disseminating the style. The majority of the musicians interviewed have attended KlezFest and a number have taught there.

The general concept of KlezFest is taken from the more established KlezKamp, which was founded in 1984 by Henry Sapoznik. KlezKamp is a residential course lasting

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<sup>106</sup> KlezFest London. There is also a KlezFest in St Petersburg, Russia.

usually one week and has taken place in the Catskills, just outside New York City and also near Philadelphia. KlezFest is non-residential, although it attracts many students from around the UK, Europe and a smaller number from further afield who stay in local accommodation. Many of the activities mirror KlezKamp and the faculty has traditionally comprised of teachers from the USA, who also teach at KlezKamp. Due to funding cuts from 2009, there was a greater emphasis on locally sourced teachers, which had a significant impact on the dynamic of the course. This change has been useful in highlighting the unique dynamic of UK klezmer teaching, rather than a dilution of the American scene. The majority of the musicians that I spoke with, and work with regularly, have close associations with KlezFest. The majority have been students, with many returning in an advisory capacity, although significantly few as teachers.

*Performing Ethnomusicology* (Solis, 2004) addresses many issues regarding cultural authority and knowledge versus technical prowess and associated authority in a teaching situation. Trimillos' chapter discusses the notion of 'the culture bearer and staged authenticity', where students have expectations that the teacher will be of a certain culture:

From the point of view of the institution ... the culture bearer as study group teacher embodies immediate authenticity, an insider who 'culturally knows' ... A second aspect of authenticity concerns the phenotype; the culture bearer looks the native. Visual credibility figuratively colors the reception of the knowledge delivered and performances mounted.

(Trimillos, 2004, p.38)

There is a similar importance placed on lineage in Western Art Music institutions where great importance is placed on who one's teacher was and who their teacher was. Lineage is distinct from heritage, yet there is overlap. Cottrell, referring to Kingsbury, highlights this:

If you are part of this tradition your interpretation of a given artwork is supposedly more meaningful than those who do not have this direct connection with the work's historical roots; yet this added authority must come from

information imparted aurally (and orally) by the teacher, and not reside in the musical score which, of course, is available to all.

(Cottrell, 2004, p.40)

I have certainly found that, at times, my Jewish students at KlezFest have a considerable advantage over me. Many have experience of Modern Hebrew that assists them with some of the terms. Three important modes used in klezmer, *Mi Shebarakh*, *Ahava Raba* and *Adonoi Molokh* (lit: the Lord is king), have been labelled by A.Z. Idelsohn (1929) according to the first words of the prayers that they are associated with. As I have already mentioned, these modes are not exclusively used in cantorial chant and the labelling of them with Hebrew names is a relatively recent development. I recall one of my early teaching experiences at KlezFest, where a non-Jewish student asked for a translation of *Mi Shebarakh*. I wasn't able to give one, but a Jewish student who had been learning how to use the mode in question was able to provide a translation. This certainly highlighted an advantage that students with such a background might have. I was also mindful that my ignorance of the translation of the terms had the potential to undermine my authority as a teacher. As a performer, I had not found it necessary to know what *Mi Shebarakh* means, concentrating instead on how to use the mode stylistically. There is also a link between cultural authority and what might be called technical authority. In the above example, I was able to demonstrate to my students how to play within *Mi Shebarakh* and assert my technical authority, but I was not able to claim cultural authority and, indeed, on that particular occasion I failed to answer a culturally contextual question.

This raises the question of justification. Do I, as a non-Jewish teacher, need to justify what I am teaching with reference to a more established source? I am certainly conscious of always citing established sources rather than simply pointing to my own practice. This begs the further question of what makes these sources so credible and accepted. Are the materials that musicians use seen as coming from Jewish heritage sources? And, does this serve to strengthen the authority of performers and teachers who can also lay claim to being part of this heritage?

## **Real/Fake books**

As well as attending courses such as KlezFest, many students and upcoming performers, as well as professional musicians new to the style, rely on books and recordings to become proficient. Musicians are expected to have a firm grasp of a core repertoire, which is usually expected to be memorised. In his discussion of the Philadelphia Sher Medley, Netsky points to this legacy by referring to mid-twentieth century klezmer musicians:

a knowledge of the entire sher medley from start to finish became a barometer of both other's technical skill as a musician and one's serious commitment to the klezmer scene. If you either 'didn't know the sher' or 'couldn't make it through the sher', you were, quite plainly, not fit to share the stage with those who did or could.

(Netsky, 2008, p.294)

As well as practical reasons, such as negating the need for page turns, there appears to be an aspect to this memorisation of tunes that points to the importance placed on the oral tradition within klezmer. Clearly, if one has studied and practised the music, then it is logical that it be committed to memory and many musicians, myself included, find that a fluency comes from not having to look at sheet music; this is also very much the case in the Western art music tradition. However, on the klezmer scene, there is an added dimension whereby musicians may be empowered by this supposed continuation of this oral tradition. As Bohlman (2008) states:

The music of the village synagogue, transmitted in large part orally, frequently functioned as folk music, and so too did the music of the home and the Jewish tavern.

(p.4)

The dilemma lies in the fact that, on today's klezmer scene, tunes are often taught orally in groups and, for many musicians, the majority of which come from a mainly classical background, this may prove difficult to pick up. Perhaps ironically, the majority of the teachers have also come from a classical background. Certainly, sheet music books are an

important part of the process, but they are seldom used in group tuition. I recall being castigated by another teacher<sup>107</sup> for using sheet music in the second KlezFest where I taught, despite the fact that this seemed to be pedagogically the logical thing to do to enable the students to play a complete tune in the relatively short time I had with them: ‘Oh dear, you’re teaching from lead sheets’. The fact remains that nineteenth-century musicians in the pale of settlement learnt music via an oral tradition because many were not *able* to read music. The majority of students attending KlezFest are able to read music, largely due to the instrumental tuition infrastructure in the UK based on the ABRSM<sup>108</sup> grade system.

Perhaps the most important book and, for many students, their first purchase is *The Compleat [sic] Klezmer* (Sapoznik, 1987). This book contains a collection of tunes taken from early twentieth-century recordings. The music is notated with some ornamentation, but there has been an attempt to compromise accuracy for readability. There are illustrations on many pages and there is a brief historical overview and stylistic summary. The music is notated in ‘fakebook’ format of melody line and chords. The accompanying instrumentalists are, it is to be assumed, to either know what to do already or to refer to the stylistic pointers in the introduction for guidance. The original concept of a ‘fakebook’ is that, by providing melody and chords only, the musician will be able to ‘fake’ an accompaniment, the audience perhaps assuming that they are playing from a full score (for further information, see Kernfeld, 2006).

The use of such a fakebook format raises a number of significant points. The first is that, with roots in modal music, the harmonisation of klezmer melodies is open to considerable interpretation. Some bands opting for complex harmonies and others, aiming for a ‘traditional’ interpretation, focus on one or two chords, or even a drone, which emphasises the modality of the music. The *Compleat Klezmer* harmonisations encourage students to play the same chords and set a universal standard. Also, much in the same way that the ‘Real Book’ (Hal Leonard, 2005) has done for jazz, the *Compleat Klezmer*

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<sup>107</sup> Who self-identified as Jewish, although this is perhaps incidental.

<sup>108</sup> Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

elevates some tunes as ‘standards’. This, therefore, makes them required material for any musician aiming to work within the style and makes them convenient teaching material. Conversely, as has become the case in jazz, it means that these tunes are often avoided by more discerning or advanced players as they are seen as being played too often. I have found that, sometimes, musicians will play a tune from the *Compleat Klezmer* simply because they haven’t played it in a while; ironically enough, sometimes advanced musicians may struggle to remember certain sections. As one Jewish musician articulated:

If you don’t know the *Compleat Klezmer* – if you don’t know it off by heart, then you are wasting your time because those tunes will probably come out at a wedding when you run out of tunes. Even if the band doesn’t play it. It’s like Autumn Leaves – it’s such a standard that if you don’t know it, you have no place. [PT: [Some bands] don’t play tunes like that because they are too standard aren’t they? Obviously bands want a little bit of innovation.] That’s right. If you don’t know them, it’ll show – and one of those tunes might come up – and they do play two or three of those tunes sometime. [PT: They get requested and stuff.] You know occasionally you might go into it or a dep<sup>109</sup> might start playing it. If you don’t know those tunes, you’re not even on page one. If you don’t know them completely well.

The publication of a collection of tunes or, perhaps, a method is likely to elevate the ‘author’ with regard to their authority on the scene, in much the same way as academia. Although I have not made a rigorous investigation, there is a strong link between the main texts used in the klezmer revival and the musicians responsible for shaping it. As I have already mentioned, Sapoznik heads *KlezKamp* in the USA. The self-styled ‘Dr Klez’, Josh Horowitz (2001), edited *Ultimate Klezmer* which is a compilation of tunes originally published<sup>110</sup> by Kostakowski in 1916. Mel Bay’s *Klezmer Collection* is ‘by’ Stacey Phillips who, we might speculate with a less Jewish-sounding name, needs to provide extra support from figures who are seen as more Real Deal. Phillips, therefore, includes interviews with leading figures of the revival. Andy Statman, whose move from bluegrass to klezmer was played out not only very publically, but also visually, as he now performs sporting a long beard and *kippa*. Also included is an interview with *Dr* Walter

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<sup>109</sup> Deputy.

<sup>110</sup> Originally titled *International Hebrew Wedding Music*.



Zev Feldman, who is known as ‘Zev’ within the scene, and much is made of his academic credentials in the introduction to the interview, in which Phillips is particularly self-effacing:

An ethnomusicologist is trained to analyze music much more rigorously than philistines like myself. I found it best to ask a couple of questions and then let Doctor Feldman roll.

(Phillips, 1996, p.174)

This constructed nature of modern klezmer with its origins in the USA has had an important bearing on how the scene has been constructed in London and the UK. Ilana Cravitz’s recently published book *Klezmer Fiddle: a how to guide* (2008) is perhaps the most prescriptive of the books used on the London scene. It’s prominence on the London scene is due not only to Cravitz’s activeness in teaching at SOAS and organising local jam sessions, but also to the fact that the book has been issued to every student attending KlezFest since 2009. Cravitz pays meticulous attention to detail, notating and labelling every ornament. There is also an exemplar CD which includes ‘minus one’ play-a-long versions of the tunes, as well as exemplar recordings. There are pull-out sections for *sekund* violin accompaniment, as well as bass lines written by Stuart Brotman. I was curious to hear from two non-Jewish musicians on how they thought the music they played could evoke a feeling of heritage *without* the ornaments that many feel are important to the transmission of the style:

I notice that actually, for example with both me and the [clarinet] player, we don’t, for example use any *krekhtz* in our playing. We don’t put that ornament in – in fact that’s actually something I’ve learnt about recently. However, that hasn’t... the older people who listen to us really enjoying it and saying ‘oh, that’s fantastic, it really reminds me of when I was growing up and although we are not necessarily putting all of these ornaments in, but, so there is an element in it of Jewishness, but we’re not necessarily doing all the bits.

I think if I had an understanding with the feel, I think I could, if I embarked on it right. If I didn’t, if I’d just sat down perusing books and, you know, mordents and appoggiaturas and slurs and what have you then no, of course not. I mean, it would never happen so. I think it can be done, I mean, OK, I’m not from the Jewish tradition, but, you know, I feel very passionate about music and I’d like to

think that I express myself with music. And that's essentially, well, that's one reason of course of many, why the Jewish people play the music so well because a lot of the musicians have got a tremendous affinity with the music. You know, they really feel it. It's in their body, you know. And I'd like to think that, well, music's my way of creativity

Needless to say, musicians who are part of the wider KlezFest/JMI umbrella do not feel that the musicians in the above quote *are* expressing Jewishness, at least in the way that they are prescribing it. These particular musicians, who are not performing the 'prescribed' ornaments, are certainly managing to work successfully, suggesting that klezmer has acquired a life of its own independently of the Jewish community. Perhaps 'suggested' ornaments might be a more passive word, as musicians will come to their 'own way of doing things' (Cravitz, 2008, Preface). Some musicians, in this case a Jewish musician, do feel that KlezFest is prescriptive:

Well – the thing is that there is this klezmer institution or there is a klezmer institution, ie KlezFest and, you know, the parent of which is KlezKamp. It kind of sanctions the way you should and shouldn't learn to play that music.

The way in which many musicians have acquired their skills in the UK today is through taking ABRSM<sup>111</sup> exams and perhaps also through higher education/ conservatoire. It is, therefore, unsurprising that musicians will seek or even expect a similar structure for learning klezmer.

Finally, all of these books make reference to recordings either as suggested listening or because they are the source for the transcriptions. This serves to preferentiate some versions over others. An example of this is *Araber Tanz*, a tune of likely non-Jewish origin, although this has not been proven. As Sapoznik (1987) used a recording by Naftule Brandwein (18 February, 1926) for his transcription, this has been the basis for most modern versions. The other notable recording of the same tune by Dave Tarras receives much less attention. The use of pictures in the *Compleat Klezmer* also contributes to what could be called idolisation, which is certainly compliant with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Slobin's notion of enshrinement. This situation, where a

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<sup>111</sup> Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

commercial version of a heritage has been set up by those willing and able to take control, was expressed to me by a Jewish musician:

It depends what your definition of tradition is. I think a lot of it has been conjectured and imagined by the so-called kind of luminaries and experts and current living legends such as Brave Old World and all these sort of academic people.

What is important about this notion of idolisation is the manner in which the information is disseminated; it contributes to klezmer's claim as a heritage music. Such is the demand for 'Jewish' music as passed down through the older generation that it can sometimes be misguided. The repertoire of German Goldenstein (1934-2006), an elderly Moldovan immigrant to the USA, has proven to be particularly popular on the international klezmer scene and certainly in London. It was revealed by one non-Jewish musician, who has spent a good deal of time researching Moldovan music, that many of his tunes have scant, if any, Jewish associations. Whether the music being adopted by a Jewish performer makes the music Jewish, or the particular performance style, is perhaps a chicken and egg scenario. Bohlman (2008) has pointed to this idolisation of such musicians who have had direct contact with the 'old country':

The music of the shtetl, popular musics performed by seemingly countless musicians designating themselves as 'the last klezmer', and Hassidic music all thrive, reviving a past orientalism and reimagining the possibility of new authenticity.

(pp.68-69)

Who, after all, would question these musicians, particularly if the music they reveal is coherent with prevailing projected images? The fear of having nearly lost the music, together with the rewards of having discovered something over which ownership can be claimed, make for an exciting mix for Jewish musicians.

## The Band of Drunks

In 2008, in casual conversation with Frank London in his capacity as programme director of KlezFest, I asked him if he and others in similar positions were not using the forum of KlezFest to further promote their careers by controlling the teaching of the music they play. His reply was ‘totally’. In subsequent years, I have come to realise my own naivety in this regard. In today’s competitive music markets, one would be foolish not to capitalise on whatever one can, and heritage is simply another marketing tool. However, it made me realise that only musicians who can lay claim to being Jewish *can* do this.

In the liner notes to his album with the Klezmer Brass All Stars, *Di Shikere Kapelye* (2000) (*lit.*: band of drunks), he mentions how members of the band on the recording were descended from Eastern European Jewish musicians, quite possibly a legendary band called *Di Shikere Kapelye*. In reality, this ‘legendary’ band is fictitious, but it illustrates a wider point: members of the band *could* be descended from musicians who *might* have played in a band like *Di Shikere Kapelye*. The band is, therefore, claiming an imagined past that *could* be true. Whether this is more for fun or commercial reasons is unclear, but it would seem that both contribute to the overall image and commercial appeal of the band. The common link is that they are Jewish; the implication is that there is authority in what they are performing by them asserting this link as a Real Deal credential. London refers to the band’s biography on his website as ‘Officially sanctioned folklore’. Here is an extract from the CD liner notes:

Before there was a Klezmer Revival and ‘World Music’, before the cultural assimilation of American Jews and the rebirth of the state of Israel with its modern Hebrew, before the devastation and destruction of East European Jews and Yiddish culture, before the massive waves of emigration to the new worlds, before there were recordings, before modernity itself, there was *Di Shikere Kapelye* – the illustrious and infamous Inebriated Orchestra (or, the Band of Drunks). *Di Shikere Kapelye*, the group that, by necessity, initiated the itinerant aspect of a klezmer’s life, and gave klezmorim their lasting name.

Few hard facts are known about this influential, early 19<sup>th</sup> century ensemble. What little we do know comes from a variety of sources: anecdotes and oral

histories with older, living klezmerim (whose grandparents may have heard or played in *Di Shikere Kapelye*).

(Liner notes to *Di Shikere Kapelye*, 2000)

It is evident that London is having some fun by playing on his authority to lay claim to this heritage, however partially bogus it might be. The members of the band are listed as ‘*Yikhes* (lineage)’, taking this one step further. The influence of Ben Mandelson, as an early producer of Frank London’s other band, *The Klezmatics*, points to the appeal that theatrically can have to the success of an album. In my discussions and performing experience with Mandelson, I have found him to be particularly aware of heritage as a selling point. Mandelson’s band, *3 Mustaphas 3*, in the 1980s came from a fictitious place called Szegerey. All of the musicians assumed characters and Turkish/Balkan pseudonyms or alter egos.

Anagnostu (2009) has pointed out that ‘Jewish Americans [are] recognized as distinctly ethnic, claiming unique cultures, histories, and religions’ (p.1). Anagnostu calls such groups ‘ethnoracial’, which is a distinct discourse from any supposed ‘racial’ groupings:

On the one hand, the racialized ascription places these collectives within the boundaries of whiteness, pointing to their current entrenchment as white in the national imagination. On the other hand, the ethnic marker attaches a cultural hue that differentiates these populations from unmarked whiteness. It is often thought that white ethnics possess culture, in contrast to the cultureless whiteness of the general population.

(Anagnostou, 2009, p.2)

It is logical to see how assertions of ‘ethnic whiteness’ by any Jewish musicians may allow them to play with these issues of heritage. Although the study mentioned above deals with America, parallels can be drawn with London, where a shared ‘whiteness’ can allow musicians to project themselves as a white ‘ethnic’ without too many people questioning it.

In calling the band ‘All Star’, London is also asserting authority. From the world-wide klezmer scene, this band features the ‘stars’, which is naturally a selling point. London’s

respected position allows him to make this claim, but this self-proclamation is not one of heritage but of musical prowess: all of the musicians are highly respected in their own right. However, this juxtapositioning of 'All Star' with these implications of heritage may imply to audiences that the two may be linked.

There is a similar self-proclamation of elitism that could be associated with the Yiddish Summer project in Weimar, Germany. It is a residential course that seeks to cultivate and develop advanced klezmer musicians. Much has been written (Gruber, 2002) about the reclamation of Jewish culture in Germany and I was keen to see if a similar thing has happened in London. A number of Jewish musicians from the London scene have attended this course, although there are many non-Jewish musicians who attend from all over the world. It is clear from the following interview with programme director Alan Bern that being Jewish is a particularly important element, certainly to his development of the music:

Ich identifiziere mich mit der jüdischen Kulture. Ich entdecke mehr und mehr, dass viele meiner tiefsten persönlichen Werte eine lange Verbindung zur jüdischen Tradition haben, und das kann kein Zufall sein. Die vielleicht Wichtigsten sind: Vielseitigkeit, eine Dialektik des Individualismus und Zugehörigkeit zu eine Gemeinschaft, die Auslegung der Gegenwart mittels eine tiefen Reflektion über die Vergangenheit, und eine Art spiritueller Idealismus, welcher die Wahrheit über die Macht stellt.

(Bern, 2010)

I identify with Jewish culture. I discover more and more that much of my deepest personal worth has a long connection with Jewish tradition and that is no coincidence. Perhaps the most important are: the multifacetedness, a dialectic of individuality and affinity to a collective, the interpretation of the presence of a deep reflection of the past, and a type of spiritual idealism, where the truth of the power lies.

(My translation)

(Accessed online 29 September 2010

[http://www.the-other-europeans.eu/pdf/interv\\_alan\\_bern.pdf](http://www.the-other-europeans.eu/pdf/interv_alan_bern.pdf) )

I have discussed with a number of musicians about whether they feel this potential claim to monopolise on the style is fair. One non-Jewish musician mentioned Alan Bern in particular, which perhaps serves as an interesting reflection on the above quote:

Well, I don't think it's unfair. I don't know about Frank London – I remember when Alan Bern said to me 'Oh yeah, I love Balkan music' he said 'that's the first type of music I played when I first got into Eastern European music, it was Balkan music... I couldn't make a living from it. ... So that's why I turned to klezmer – because people take me seriously. Because I'm... Jewish.' He can make a living playing klezmer. And that's basically what he ended up doing from that.

This has led me to speculate if Jews in London have also chosen to play Jewish music because they can make Real Deal claims on the music and, as Bern is quoted as saying, be taken 'seriously'. That the above quote comes from a non-Jewish musician perhaps diminishes the strength of the evidence. However, the quote above from the interview with Alan Bern on his own website would suggest the non-Jewish musician's anecdote is valid. It would seem that it hasn't and this may be due to a number of reasons. First, the klezmer scene is relatively small in comparison with that of the USA. It is significant that the *Other Europeans* project makes liberal use of American musicians, perhaps to make up numbers. Second, after 2008, when the American faculty were scaled back, the institution of KlezFest has had a relatively small number of local teachers, barely enough to put together a full klezmer band. An increasing number of non-Jewish teachers are becoming involved and one reason for this may be simply to keep a full programme of teaching. Rather predictably, the musicians I interviewed would not admit that being seen as Jewish would have an important bearing on their teaching:

I don't know, I think people's teaching styles are different and actually, people, if they think they are getting the real deal will go... It's like [that notable UK-based klezmer musician], you know, she's fairly Jewish, she's not, you know, it depends how you define Jewish, of course, but you know, people don't think, 'oh, I won't go to [her] because she's not Jewish enough' - they think [she's] the real deal - she plays klezmer authentically, she's what I want to hear. I think people go to the people that they respect in terms of their playing. ... And how they play it and the passion they play it with and how well known they are and whether they like their teaching style. So, I'm not sure that... Whether the fact that I'm Jewish or not makes a difference. I don't... I've never asked people, again... I mean it's difficult to say...

Of course, this last comment is particularly truthful. It would be an odd thing to ask a class or individual student if it mattered to them if the teacher is Jewish. Consequently, this makes evidencing such things particularly difficult.

As part of the London scene there are few, if any, klezmer bands that are comprised only of musicians who self-identify as Jewish. This means that cultivating a group image based on cultural heritage is difficult. This also has the potential to polarise the musicians who are perceived by the audience as Jewish and those who are not.

### **Policing the style**

I have discussed how students of klezmer are encouraged to learn through certain channels, such as the JMI's KlezFest, which has a prescribed set of study materials. I have also suggested that this is in the interests of professional klezmer musicians in the UK and further afield. However, what happens when musicians deviate from this, or are felt for some other reason not to satisfy the demands of those empowered to decide? I was interested to read Hankus Netsky's comments on this:

On the other hand, many students of klezmer are not Jewish, and once they become professional, they still find themselves subject to the suspicions of the Jewish community, which remains strongly proprietary concerning their casually discarded ethnic culture. I always tell my students that anyone who aspires to play another community's ethnic music will eventually have to prove themselves to the '*mavens*' (experts) of that community, and that I hope they will pass the test. If they really grasp the essence of the style, they always will. In the early days of the KCB it was Don Byron, a clarinetist of Jamaican-American descent, who received the toughest scrutiny. As he pointed out, his outsider status made him both a major symbol of the revival and a catalyst for its wider acceptance.

(Netsky in Solis, 2004, p.198)

Netsky has been instrumental in developing the modern klezmer genre through his work with the Klezmer Conservatory Band, which is in itself suggestive of institutional prescriptivity. The Klezmer Conservatory Band was started by Hankus Netsky at the New England Conservatory of Music in 1980 and many of its former members, such as



Frank London, Deborah Strauss and Jeff Warschauer,<sup>112</sup> went on to be central members of the klezmer revival.

Who are these '*mavens*' mentioned by Netsky? Are they the teachers at KlezFest, or does this even extend a level higher to the JMI, which employs the teachers? Certainly, a regular feature of the curriculum at KlezFest has been the 'master class', where students perform in front of the faculty. Students are expected to perform a polished performance without technical errors. The focus is placed on the 'communication' of the music - or, as I have heard several teachers articulate, whether or not we 'believe' them. This appears to be problematic on several levels. Firstly, to what set of criteria are the performance judged, and are these necessarily the same as those that the student intended? Secondly, this process assumes that the music performed is a concert piece, which may prove problematic for a music originating as function music. As Bard-Rosenberg has pointed out: 'To play klezmer in a modern concert hall to an audience of self-identifying diaspora Jews and world music aficionados has a very different meaning to playing traditional music at a Jewish wedding in the shtetl in 1870' (2008).

After the 2009 KlezFest, the JMI asked the tutors 'what was so special about klezmer for them?' Rather than analyse *why* these musicians perform klezmer, for the purposes of this study I wished to extract what they thought they were trying to express that might be 'believed' by an audience. The material was published on the JMI website, so it is appropriate to include some of it here. In my role as JMI webmaster, I was able to view all the responses, only some of which were included in an article written by Geraldine Auerbach for the JMI Newsletter (2009). The responses I received from the JMI were divided into Jewish and not-Jewish sections and they are replicated here:

Written by Jewish musicians:

It's a music of a nomadic people which absorbed a flavour of foreign influences whilst at the same time retaining its uniqueness in keeping alive the Yiddish world of fashions, traditions, beliefs and fears, bound together equally importantly with the beautiful expressive qualities of Jewish, religious cantorial music. For me

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<sup>112</sup> To name only a few.

Klezmer is a celebration of individuality and community, relating to one another in the world full of intense joy and deep sadness, elegance and pride, all bound together with deep passion for what we believe in and who we became.

Most of my childhood memories are full of Jewish music. My maternal grandparents survived WWII, because my grandfather after graduating from the Music Conservatory and from his rabbinical studies in... Aside from being a rabbi, my grandfather was also a great musician [*sic.*] and singer (baritone). My grandmother accompanied him in the piano. She had a deep alto voice. My mother had a clear 'perfect pitch' soprano voice. My uncles, aunts and cousins, also enjoyed singing, so our Shabbatot dinners were always filled with songs and joy. Other Jewish festivities were also celebrated with music. Today, our grandparents are no longer with us, but, until this date, whenever possible, we gather around a table and compete among ourselves to see who remembers more nigunim, or who can recall more melodies for a specific piyut, or phrase or verse.

Written by non-Jewish musicians:

When I think of Klezmer, I think of the wonderful klezmerim I have known, the light in their eyes, their spirit and their ability to express pure feeling in music. When I think of Klezmer, I see energy and emotion expressed in dance. When I think of Klezmer, I feel in touch with both the joy and sadness of being alive. When I think of Klezmer, I feel both young and old, loved and loving, present and far away. When I think of Klezmer, I want to celebrate, take risks, explore new challenges, let the music sing through me. When I think of Klezmer, I want to pick up my instrument and play. Klezmer is special because it transcends barriers between peoples and cultures. Klezmer links the present with the past, the young with the old, the spiritual with the secular. Klezmer is special because it draws on many cultures without losing a sense of itself.

As musicians, I believe that we benefit from having a full range of emotions to express within our music-making. Klezmer allows me to express every emotion from sadness to excitement. It can be 'spoken' well using techniques learned from a classical, jazz or traditional music background - sometimes enhanced by exciting rhythms and the creative use of harmonies and arrangements... However, it is the freedom to express oneself, unrestricted by musical notation that excites me most. It is a constant labour of love to capture how that was done by the masters on the old recordings and by modelling my techniques on some of the wonderful Klezmer musicians we have had the privilege of learning from and spending time with.

It is particularly interesting to note how the Jewish responses include many examples of heritage, such as 'keeping alive... tradition' as well as mentioning the struggles of previous generations. The non-Jewish examples refer to expressing emotion, but in a

much more general way. This specificity can give emotional weight to a performance that goes beyond criticism and I have seen students break down in tears at master class sessions. This raises questions of appropriateness: should non-Jewish performers represent aspects of Jewish heritage? I asked this question of many musicians and the notion of ‘respect’ was nearly always mentioned. Again, I divide the quotes into Jewish and non-Jewish:

#### Jewish

I mean, I’m doing a performance at the holocaust survivors centre... it’s too big a thing that they went through, so I’m going to keep it quite upbeat actually. But still being respectful.

In terms of authenticity... I’m always going to be this... English guy. Who at least has respect and appreciation and has some sort of cultural heritage there.

#### Non-Jewish

Still respecting tradition and you know, approaching all of this stuff with respect, but giving it you own individuality, even if it’s just – even if the vocabulary is just the same but just the spirit.

I’ve got a real respect for the tradition and I’ll try and get as much of the detail as I can in certain circumstances but then I’m really proud to bring my own style to it and see what happens.

How this respect is defined by individual performers is likely to be context specific and open to any number of variables. Those who are empowered to gauge this respect are those who can lay claim to the heritage. Further justification is not required, thus creating a tension between musicians because certain things just *are not done: olmaz*.

Taylor has pointed to this trend in an internet forum he monitored in 1996, where the seemingly innocent question ‘does anyone know anything about sitar music?’ was asked. Taylor draws two main strands of argument from the forum:

If a western musician approaches the music to be appropriated with respect and good intentions, then all is forgiven. The other main argument was the belief that music is universal, free, available to anyone and everyone who wants to put it to

their own uses. This latter group seemed to view music as having a life of its own: 'Music **is** free,' proclaimed one posting, 'regardless of the recording industry's attempt to make you think otherwise.'

(Taylor, 1997, p.18)

I had expected everyone to say music is universal and open to all and I discuss this further in the next chapter. However, a musician's ability to play klezmer may not be validated by all, and within the klezmer music scene there are a number of options for musicians to feel validated by, as Netsky called them, the *mavens*.

### **Jewish Music Competition**

A regular feature at KlezFest is 'Klezmer: the next generation' whereby up-and-coming performers perform to the faculty who then decide who is best. The JMI, in conjunction with the Jewish Chronicle (JC), ran a 'Klezmer Idol' competition in 2007, perhaps to empower another 'maven', although this may be an overly cynical outlook on my part. One way for a community, in the broadest sense, to establish the parameters of a style is to reward those who conform and excel within those parameters. The very fact that there has been a Klezmer *Idol* competition confirms that, quite literally, they see idolisation as an important development on the scene. The Klezmer Idol competition clearly follows on from the success of the ITV television series *Pop Idol*, which ran for two series on 2001/2 and 2003 before being replaced with the now globally successful *X Factor*. Several of the bands that entered the competition are central to this study. The ten bands were Kosmos, Klezmer Gourmet, Klezmer KolectiV (*sic*), Matzos,<sup>113</sup> Moishe's Bagel, She'koyokh Klezmer Ensemble, Shir, K-Groove, The Solomon Sisters and Beskydy. The winner was decided by people listening to two mp3 files on the JCC website and voting via email. The winner was Stewart Curtis' K-Groove and the accolade and peer recognition no doubt helped in promoting his band.<sup>114</sup> He was also invited to perform at KlezFest in the

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<sup>113</sup> Not to be confused with the London-based Matzoh Boys.

<sup>114</sup> A gig at the National Theatre on 27 December 2007 was billed as 'clarinet-led Jewish dance music from winner of the Klezmer Idol 2007 competition'. Accessed online at <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/4272/music/stewart-curtis-klezmer-trio.html> 18 December 2011.

Park<sup>115</sup> in 2007. As detailed below, it is noteworthy that Curtis has not been asked to teach at KlezFest, although he was voted as Klezmer Idol by the Jewish community. I feel that it is also significant that K-Groove are not a 'traditional' klezmer band, at least according to the JMI, and that Stewart Curtis is a well-known face within the North London Jewish Community through his teaching as well as his work with function bands.

Based in Amsterdam, the International Jewish Music Festival allows bands to compete for 'prizes, bookings, recording contracts and agency representation'.<sup>116</sup> The competition is open to all bands, although there is a pre-selection process. Any style is welcome to submit an application, but the music must have a recognisably 'Jewish element'. Quite what this may be is not clearly defined on the website and one can assume that this is to be decided by the judges, who we might label as *mavens* to use Netsky's term. Ironically enough, in 2010 Netsky worked as a judge at the competition.

The list of prizes and rewards is extensive:

- Grand prize (jury's choice)
- Audience prize
- Prize for the best performance of the mandatory piece 'A Glezele Yash'<sup>117</sup>
- Trophy
- Introductions to recording companies and Jewish festivals worldwide
- Potential bookings at the Concertgebouw and in Dutch Jewish music series
- Bookings at leading Jewish and mainstream venues
- City Winery Artistic Excellence Award, for the most creative combination, including paid performance at City Winery (NYC) and a case of private bottled wine with a customised label featuring the artist's photo/name/logo
- International Jewish Presenters Association award, a showcase opportunity in front of the 100-plus presenters at Schmooze, the annual IJPA conference
- Two ensembles will receive representation by the leading New York agency, Golden Land.

The website states that the competition is open to all performers of Jewish music 'regardless of their own religious affiliation'. In 2008, She'yoyokh won first prize at this

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<sup>115</sup> An event in Hyde Park that formed part of KlezFest, London.

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.ijmf.org/> accessed 29 September 2010.

<sup>117</sup> In 2008, this was *Ale Broider*.

competition with only one musician who self-identifies as Jewish. It is perhaps notable that, even though She’koyokh did not get into the top three in the UK Klezmer Idol a year earlier, they won an international competition. Whether this is a marker of difference between the London and international scene, the band’s improvement in less than a year, or a difference between the London Jewish community’s taste and that of the selected jury’s is difficult to discern.

In order to fully prove Netsky’s point about *mavens* in the community, we would need to ascertain if the jury is, in fact, Jewish. Ironically enough, this is often difficult to tell without asking and without using circumstantial evidence: the surnames may be the only way to guess (jewdar notwithstanding). We can assume that the Klezmer Idol competition was mostly decided by the Jewish community, as the competition was disseminated via their dedicated press, the Jewish Chronicle.

### **Halachic Judaism**

Within Judaism there is considerable importance placed on being born to a Jewish mother. This can be complicated, as Brook (1989) articulates below:

Reform Judaism may not subscribe to Halachah<sup>118</sup> in all its Byzantine intricacies, but it does accept many of its basic rulings, even while it chooses to ignore others. The child of a Jewish mother is Jewish, according to Halachah. Consequently, if a Jewish male marries a non-Jewish mother female, their offspring will not be Jewish unless their mother converts, and even then a reform conversion is dismissed as invalid by the Orthodox.

(p.136)

As a performer of secular music, one is unlikely to come under the direct scrutiny of the *Beth Din* (Rabbinical court). However, a musician with a Jewish father will potentially have a Jewish surname, but not strict status as a Jew within Orthodoxy. This was certainly the case with a number of the musicians I spoke to who self-identified as Jewish. They are thought of as Jewish on the scene, but have Jewish fathers with mothers

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<sup>118</sup> Religious law.

who converted. I discussed in the previous chapter the ramifications having a Jewish surname might have in terms of stimulating jewdar. This has further implications with regard to empowerment, as one non-Jewish musician revealed:

Because some people in Jewish culture like to stay inside that circle and maybe if they are booking a band for their wedding, firstly they are going to think, if they are Jewish they might know what they are doing more and... then there's... well, on our business cards we deliberately put both... numbers on, and [the Jewish musician] was adamant about having our surnames, because [it was] thought that if they see [such a Jewish sounding surname], they are going to think this is a Jewish [band]... Maybe [that musician is] going to know what [they are] doing. But then it's useful to have two numbers... You can't just rely on one person.

This can be viewed in a number of ways. Historically, Jews have employed other Jews as they can maintain consistency with regard to religious observance (see Brook, 1989, p.303). It could be that this practice has carried over into other aspects of casual employment, such as the engagement of musicians. It is a widely known fact on the London klezmer scene that there are 'klezmer' bands that operate within the community (or communities). One non-Jewish musician revealed one reason why they thought non-Jews were getting fewer bookings within these communities:

It's quite obvious that my, sort of, strings attached to that particular community do not exist. In my experience, the Jews... people who play at certain Jewish functions and Jewish events, they are often run quite tightly in a business point of view, from one particular band leader or something, who's evidentially connected to that community and they are very tight-knit and tribal you might say and I think they do actually probably care a bit. I mean, the Jewish community is a special example really. I mean, it's not the same as people from a particular region of Europe, or... [PT: But do you think that Jewish band leaders are more likely to take a Jewish musician, than a non-Jewish musician?] I would say that they probably are, simply because people in that community tend to work together and if you're not from that community, or don't have any sort of history with them, then they'd be unlikely to know who you are even if you play your instrument very well, there'd be somebody else who's more of a colleague than you are.

Another non-Jewish musician simply accepted it as a given, without offering much further explanation:

Because it's a tight-knit community. And Jewish people look after each other. They just do. That's how it is with Jewish people.

An example of such a band leader is Danny Shine, who runs Neshama together with his brother, Jonny.<sup>119</sup> A BBC Radio 3 session with Max Reinhardt<sup>120</sup> focusing on Shine makes much of his connection with the community and his heritage by mentioning that he comes from 'a musical family: my father was a cantor, both my parents play piano and we all sing. We all sang round the table on a Friday every week to see Shabbat (the Sabbath).'<sup>121</sup> Neshama's website<sup>122</sup> clearly caters for the London Jewish community. In the list of styles covered, the first three are 'Klezmer, Israeli, Chassidic'. This version of 'Klezmer' is radically different to that as taught by the JMI and is much more in keeping with Israeli popular function music. This potential confusion was explained by a Jewish musician, which confirmed what I had already experienced:

In fact, my confusion was in some ways good. I was confusing... what people want now when they have a wedding or a barmitzvah is klezmer, which is not actually klezmer; they don't want klezmer. I didn't know that. But that was my confusion and that's why I went into it with such optimism and actually, although people don't want klezmer, they want something that they think is called klezmer. So, that's worked out quite well.

With regard to function music, it would seem a bad move to endeavour to persuade a client that their understanding of klezmer is, according to the JMI, wrong. Consequently, those musicians serving the community's needs in terms of function music will be empowered to shape the style on one level. When asked in the BBC interview for a definition of Jewish music, it is klezmer that is foregrounded: 'How would I define Jewish music? With difficulty. There's klezmer, there's Israeli style dance, there's folk Israeli, there's Hassidic'.

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<sup>119</sup> Significantly without an 'h' in the spelling. Jon or Jonathan having much stronger associations with Judaism than John, being derived from Nathan (the prophet).

<sup>120</sup> First broadcast Radio 3: 20 April 2002. Reinhardt is himself a prominent figure on the London klezmer scene and he was the compère for Klezmer in the Park, 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Accessed online 1 October 2010

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/world/onyourstreet/msdanny1.shtml>

<sup>122</sup> <http://www.neshama-music.co.uk/>



It would not be unreasonable for such a musician to assert authority without further explanation on account of *just knowing* what works as a result of being part of the North London community. Indeed, a contact address is given on the website that is situated in the Finchley/Hendon/Golders Green area of London, which has the densest concentration of Jews in London. This is not to suggest that Shine only restricts himself to Jewish musicians; he doesn't. As the majority of Neshama's gigs are, to quote the BBC interview, 'in the community', it is only logical that many musicians that he may be familiar with are not too far removed from that community themselves. As is the case with any band, suitably competent musicians are sourced as required. Shine hints in the interview that he has gone through a large number of musicians who were not able to fulfil his brief:

Not all of the band members are Jewish but they all like playing Jewish music. I've worked in this business now for 15 years and I've gone through a large number of musicians. You learn quite quickly who's done this kind of thing before.

(Shine, 2002. Accessed online 1 October 2010  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/world/onyourstreet/msdanny1.shtml> )

Shine is almost acting as a 'quality' controller for the community here and his success is clearly based on his ability to judge their needs. I have not been asked to play with Neshama and my visible involvement at KlezFest may be a reason for this. I have performed background jazz at a wedding where Neshama were the main band and I managed to observe their sound check. I have also played with some of the musicians who Shine often uses. Although Neshama does not fall within the scene I am studying, they represent an important and visible 'other' in London and their work has an important bearing, albeit indirect, on the scene on which I have been active. Although I have not had direct contact with them as part of my fieldwork, they form an important counterweight case study.

## **Moving from the *Klezmer Hoyz* to the Klezmer Caravan**

In early September 2010, the JMI announced to the faculty that KlezFest would be taking a ‘sabbatical’. Initially, this was understood to be as a result of funding cuts, as both the 2009 and 2010 events had struggled financially due to cutbacks resulting in a reduced American faculty. However, the motives were more fundamental and were articulated thus:

As I said at the end of KlezFest this year – we want to go out and make a noise with klezmer this year – not keep it in a tight box and expect to draw people to us. We find it hard to inveigle the teachers from Jewish schools or Jewish students to step over our threshold – even with full scholarships. So for the coming year we have decided to set up a structure and framework to help you to go out to them. We have had many suggestions from you already and hope to be setting up a ‘KlezFest Road Show’ for communities and schools and arts Festivals with song, dance and instrumental workshops and performances. We will be infiltrating local education authorities and teaching teachers. We will be crashing fresher’s weeks and working in music colleges and hospitals.

A number of issues are revealed here. The first is an acknowledgement that there is a controlled view or ‘tight box’ in terms of the material; the second is that, despite ‘inveigling’ the local Jewish population, sometimes for free, they do not seem to be interested. This confirmed suspicions outlined in Chapter Four that the music prescribed by the JMI was not aligned with the needs and expectations of the local Jewish population. Instead, they were prescribing music heavily influenced by American musicians and KlezKamp. The input of non-Jewish musicians with a diverse World Music background and little familiarity with the Jewish community may have also played a part in this. There appears to be a firm belief that this music will appeal to the local Jewish community, but it is perhaps not immediately obvious or appealing for them. Consequently, a new project was unveiled in order to be more proactive in disseminating this version of klezmer.

Whether this is a re-branding project, a re-naming, a change in approach, or a mixture of all three is unclear or yet to be seen. Certainly, it is interesting to see how this re-working

is structured. After a conflict of interests with KlezKamp who, interestingly, also have a road show, the initiative was called 'Klezmer Caravan'. Enquiries were made as to who, from the UK-based faculty, would be interested in being a 'convener'. It was at this stage of my involvement that I decided it would be best if I took a less proactive role. As webmaster for the JMI, I was tasked with creating the website and so had a useful vantage point for observation. Being employed to teach at KlezFest appeared to be more acceptable from a research point of view than actively pursuing the Jewish community.

Possibly as a result of my research, I also remain sceptical about the effectiveness of such a project. As the JMI version of klezmer is so different from that of the local communities, it will always be in danger of seeming inauthentic. If we take the word 'klezmer' as a representation of Jewish identity as understood by the local Jewish community, then it must be perceived as being the Real Deal as *they* see it. Gilmore and Pine state that:

Corporations, places, and offerings have actual identities (the *selves* to which they must be true to be perceived as authentic), not just articulations of those identities (the *representations* that accurately reflect those selves to be perceived as authentic).

(2007, p.129)

If this is to be believed, then not only must the JMI's version of klezmer fit with the London communities, but they need to be seen to embody it. If the JMI can be said to have an identity, then it needs to be seen as authentic by the larger London Jewish community in terms of being true or sincere to its authenticity of self. This relationship with London's Jewish community is far from being simple. The JMI is involved in a wide range of perceptively Jewish music such as synagogue, modern Israeli, as well as modern Jewish composers working within the Western Art Music tradition, or perhaps jazz. In the majority of this other music, it appears to be a requirement that the participants are Jewish.

As an example, the JMI's annual Cantor's Convention is necessarily an exclusively Jewish event and the role of the JMI is clearer. That some of the morning sessions begin

with *Shacharit* [morning prayers] is unlikely to seem out of place. Conversely, at KlezFest, a regular feature<sup>123</sup> was the *Shabbat tish* [*lit.*: Sabbath table] on the Friday evening that ended the week. This involved the majority of attendees sitting and eating a meal together to bring in the Sabbath. This was preceded with an optional service held in the sanctuary. The idea behind these events was initially to provide a contextual setting for the music within Judaism, but also to expose non-Jewish attendees to religious aspects that they had perhaps not experienced before. Undeniably, the atmosphere was lively and the rousing singing of *nigunim* lead by the faculty was certainly a remarkable encounter for the non-Jewish students. One non-Jewish musician articulated their reaction to KlezFest to the JMI with the following feedback:

Lively Klezmer conjures up for me the perfect Jewish Wedding celebration, awash with music, dance and laughter; Guys dancing, knees bent with bottles balanced on their black hats, driven Bulgar rhythms and a wonderful sense of camaraderie... More lyrical and rhythmic Klezmer makes me think of chanting within a circle (Niggunim) [*sic*] and entering a beautiful trance-like state, where one can feel closer to God and to one another... Whilst Klezmer is mostly intended to support Yiddish dancing, it differs from other genres in that it has become a way of expressing a 'soulful voice'. That is what I want to recreate through my [instrument].

However, for those unfamiliar with the format, repertory and etiquette at such events, there is potential to be overwhelmed with feelings of otherness that may contradict previous, more generic, experiences with klezmer. It was clear that, at some events, some non-Jews were content to be carried away with a more generic spirituality, whereas others, myself included, may have felt a strong sense of non-belonging to, what Brook (1989) has called, *The Club*. The camaraderie and social networking that may take place at such events is likely to have a bearing on the interaction of musicians who work together. Many Jewish musicians do not subscribe to the religious aspects of Judaism, yet relish these festivities. Brook, quoting a number of prominent British Rabbis, points to this:

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<sup>123</sup> Until 2009 when KlezFest moved from the West London Synagogue to SOAS.

For Wolf Mankowitz too, being Jewish is more a matter of culture than belief: ‘some people maintain that one is not Jewish until one is a Jew in the strict and Orthodox religious sense. But the Jews are bound to each other not only because of their religion and religious past. They are also bound together because of their immediate secular history, their common heroes, their common enemies, their common contemporary predicament, their common myths and needs, their common concern for the State of Israel, by the common positive as well as negative aspects of “otherness”, and even because of their present liking for certain foods, trivial as that may seem.’ Chaim Bermant cheerfully admits to the contradictions within his brand of Judaism: ‘One does not... have to be a believer to enjoy religion, or to be pained by the lack of it, and I conform to observances which I cannot in logic defend – because they defend observances which I cherish. I take pleasure in the ceremonies and ritual of Judaism as impalpable antiques.’

(Brook, 1989, p.175)

Although this quote is a little dated, the camaraderie that Brook points to has a long history in London. As I have mentioned above, ‘concern for the State of Israel’ is not a major factor for many Jewish klezmer musicians; for some, it is a contentious subject that provokes anger. Many of these cultural practices that are tied into Judaism have their roots in Ashkenazi culture as the Yiddish word *tish* suggests. Whether this close cultural association to klezmer music explains the appeal for Jewish musicians, despite the religious connotations, is difficult to ascertain. It is clear that such situations allow Jewish musicians to bond and affirm their cultural heritage. A consequence of this is that non-Jewish musicians are likely to be ostracised, from a social point of view, and this may have a bearing on professional engagements too.

### **A Jewish wedding at KlezFest**

For KlezFest 2010, it was decided that the theme of the week was to be the Jewish wedding. The faculty were encouraged to relate all teaching material to this theme. In meetings with the JMI, I stated that, for many Jewish students of klezmer, the music that they were studying was not the music they would hear at a modern Jewish wedding. I suggested that there might be questions of relevance with regard to the material. Students may wish to progress to playing at Jewish weddings and may look to the course to provide them with suitable material and tools. Indeed, there are always a good number of

professional musicians attending who are familiar with other, perhaps related, styles and are looking to branch out professionally to enhance their earning potential. I was asked by the JMI why I felt that professional jazz musicians were generally not interested in KlezFest. I answered that I didn't feel that the material was much use in developing a workable repertoire for the average Jewish wedding in London. Consequently, it was decided that, on the Wednesday afternoon when the faculty were rehearsing for the Klezmer Klimax concert, there would be a panel discussion called 'Klezmer in the real world'. This would feature musicians, at my suggestion, who were fairly well-known as exponents of klezmer and played at weddings. Interestingly enough, these musicians, such as Stewart Curtis and Maurice Chernick,<sup>124</sup> had not been invited to teach at KlezFest. Curtis has always taken a progressive view to klezmer and combined it with jazz and latin elements with his band, K-Groove. The band was formerly called Klezmer Groove, a name change that reveals much about the constraints and complications of the word 'klezmer'. In discussion with students after the event, it seemed that they found it useful. It also provided an acknowledgment and validation for them that the JMI were aware that the brand of klezmer they were teaching was distinct from the expectations of the local Jewish community: therefore, not the Real Deal.

On the Thursday night of KlezFest 2010, a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony was re-enacted. To give the event a sense of reality, one of the teachers from Ot Azoy! was actually married earlier that day and came with her new husband to play the part of the *kale* [*lit.* bride]. It was an interesting event, particularly for the non-Jewish attendee, but also for the Jewish students who were not familiar with this very traditional format that is only strictly adhered to by the largely autonomous Hassidic community. Having played a significant number of Jewish weddings over the past five years, I found much of the content to be only peripherally useful. It is unlikely that I will ever play for the Hassidic communities, who favour musicians and the majority of services from within their community. Many of the KlezFest faculty were familiar with this repertoire and, although I was able to follow many of the tunes by ear, it felt a long way from the historical music that was prescribed in the rest of the course. The event also seemed to be some way from

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<sup>124</sup> Clarinettist of the klezmer group Shir.

the type of events as outlined in Latner's (2004) *The Everything Jewish Wedding Book*. Jeff Warschauer did, however, play the electric guitar which, along with sequencers and keyboards, is as I understand it an integral part of London Hassidic weddings.<sup>125</sup>

Within the Hassidic community, musicians for weddings and other celebrations are exclusively male. This places me in a particularly advantageous position over women as a musician and researcher, although my connection with the London Hassidic community is limited. The faculty of Oy Azoy! is nearly all women. Female Yiddish singers, of which there are a number of notable examples, will find more acceptance outside of the Hassidic community, where female singing is frowned upon. I have been employed on a number of occasions where simply being male has been a notable advantage.

My reticence to take on a 'convener' role as part of the JMI's Klezmer Caravan project is not my first experience of such endeavours to influence the local Jewish population. As part of my interview with the director and founder of the JMI, Geraldine Auerbach, this came up:

Where is the audience for JMI, you know? How are we reaching a) a non-Jewish audience of young people and b) how are we actually changing the concept of Jewish music in Jews? That's our problem.

I was surprised, if a little daunted, at KlezFest 2008 to have the head of music at the Jewish Free School (JFS), the largest Jewish secondary school in the UK, attend my brass class. It has been routine practice for the JMI to offer heavily discounted rates, or even full scholarships, to music teachers in an attempt to encourage them to learn more about klezmer. It is indicative of prevalent attitudes towards klezmer within the local Jewish communities that it is so under-represented in Jewish schools. I was, therefore, very interested to hear about a series of workshops being presented at Hampstead Synagogue in early 2009 that were to receive considerable support from the JMI, with the aim of promoting klezmer in that part of London. I registered my interest and found myself on a board of advisors, together with representatives from the synagogue. A series of

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<sup>125</sup> In discussion with saxophonist/clarinetist David Bitelli, who has performed at many.

workshops were given which culminated in a *purim*<sup>126</sup> concert, for which I played with members of *Oi Va Voi* and also provided a PA system and lights (which has been a particularly useful research ‘tool’ when looking to be involved in events).

After some initial meetings, the title of *Klezmer Hoyz* (*lit* klezmer house) was given and discussions began with the synagogue about creating a haven for local klezmer musicians. It is revealing that many in the Jewish community, including the representative we were dealing with, particularly those with little knowledge of *yiddishkeit*, refer to the style incorrectly as ‘kletzmer’ (outside of the Hassidic community, most Jews in London do not speak Yiddish). The reality was that very few actually turned up to the preliminary sessions. I proposed that we bring in the London Klezmer Orchestra, a group working outside of any Jewish community and open to all denominations, to come and hold a rehearsal in the synagogue in order to give the illusion that something positive was going on. One problem with this was the diversity among the musicians in the London Klezmer Orchestra who, although many of them self-identify as Jewish, may not subscribe to the Judaism as encouraged by Hampstead Synagogue.

It was particularly interesting to deal not only with mostly Jewish musicians who were coordinating the project, but also representatives from the synagogue. I was mindful to tread carefully and be aware of my limited cultural authority to advise on such matters. Despite being superficially welcoming, there was a certain reticence on the part of the synagogue, not least on grounds that the venture remained financially viable. The *purim* event was fairly well-attended and a party atmosphere was certainly created. Overall, however, the project concluded shortly afterwards and, in terms of what it set out to achieve, it was a failure.

During one of the *Klezmer Hoyz* meetings, I volunteered to get in touch with JFS and see if they would be interested in my offering a workshop to their small klezmer group. This was welcomed, not least because I had offered my services for free, but also as they were struggling without any specialist guidance. After teaching them to sing and then play a

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<sup>126</sup> *Lit*: Lots (as in the casting or drawing of lots) in Hebrew. A celebratory Jewish festival.



short *nigun*, I gave some historical background on klezmer. Because of my previous experience at King Solomon High School, I was not surprised at how little they knew. It was interesting that I did not feel that my authority to talk on the matter was diminished because I wasn't Jewish; the matter didn't come up, although the teachers were aware of this fact. As a non-Jew, it seemed strange to try and promote klezmer to a somewhat ambivalent Jewish community. Lacking any cultural authority, I admit that it was difficult to work up much conviction for the JMI's cause. One Jewish musician was adamant that we were wasting our time trying to promote klezmer:

Not because of the way that you play, or anything to do with the music, or any assumptions that you might have about what they would think about a non-Jew playing klezmer. But why the fuck would anyone want to learn Jewish music? That's the question. Why would any non-Jew... and that is the historical question. So, that's the question: why? So, it's not to do with - that has nothing to do with their views about whether a Jew or a non-Jew is better at klezmer or... [PT So, you actually think that they might say that to Jewish people as well? Why the fuck are you playing klezmer?] Yeah, that's a different why. [PT Ah, OK, yeah. Why is a Jew playing klezmer as opposed to why are you playing klezmer.] Yeah, no – to a Jew they'd go 'what the fuck are you wasting your time with this shit for?' [PT Yeah, you should be playing Israeli music, or...] No, no, no – maybe you should be playing rock and roll or something.

Why the JMI has an interest in preserving and/or promoting this particular style of American klezmer is unclear. It seems to me that they are fighting something of a losing battle in terms of wider acceptance, as the *Klezmer Hoyz* demonstrates. It has become a curious aspect to this research that I have found myself being asked and offering advice to the JMI as to how they might promote this music. Clearly, it is music that I enjoy playing, as it is for the musicians who have been formally interviewed. Whilst there is money to be made performing this music, it is limited and doesn't represent what the JMI call 'klezmer in the real world'. This perhaps points to a constructed world by the JMI where Real Deal musicians are, at best, also constructs. It also, more importantly, suggests that there is a mismatch between the klezmer as promoted and taught by the JMI and the practical needs and preferences of the London Jewish community.

## Conclusion

It is unsurprising that non-Jewish musicians are frustrated when told without justification that they are getting it wrong. The negotiation of power has been a significant factor in the development and shaping of klezmer as style, which has been accomplished almost exclusively by Jewish musicians. This is largely due to the legacy of the so-called American 'revival'; these stylistic traits have permeated the London scene through KlezFest. The prescribed learning materials show an idolisation of certain musicians enshrining them through their recordings and transcriptions. The mediation from America to London of this canon is performed by Jewish musicians who have tasked themselves, due to their own family links, with preserving this heritage creating an authentic 'museum' of learning resources.

This invention and subsequent appropriation of a style has clearly been a positive experience and, for many, a way of life. Due to the constructed, almost pseudo-historical, nature of klezmer, it is easy to find gaps in knowledge of the style and origins. In the same way that Balinska (2009) points to the distinctly non-Jewish roots of that most Jewish of icons, the bagel, klezmer has become an expression of cultural Judaism. As Bard-Rosenberg (2008) has stressed, this is not acceptable for many Jews, who show resentment towards those who dwell on strong links between Jews and their (historical) repression in history.

Some musicians have seen it financially worthwhile to capitalise on their heritage and, again, there is a source of potential tension with musicians who cannot lay claim to this heritage. This may lead to elitism and the ostracising of some musicians. The Jewish musicians who have set themselves up as authorities can act, through competitions, workshops and master classes, as *mavens*. Perhaps, through the institutionalising of klezmer, some non-Jewish musicians feel that the style is being policed. Clearly, penalties cannot be issued; however, perhaps 'policing' is not quite the correct word, although this would appear to be the feeling that some non-Jewish musicians have towards those being prescriptive. However, it is unusual to find any established style of

music where this has not become the case, as this has become accepted practice for Western Art Music in the UK. The ABSRM has long established a benchmark for attainment through the grades system as well as complementary stylistic requirements (see Taylor, 1989 and 1991). There has long since been denigration of institutionalised jazz, although it now seems to be a very common pathway. This is articulated by jazz violinist, Regina Carter, in an interview in Enstice and Stockhouse (2004):

You don't learn jazz by going into school and reading a book and taking a class. Although that's how it's presented now in these institutions. You know, the people who go in and learn – I can hear it in their playing. [What do you hear? Stiffness?] Yeah, stiffness... they're not playing thoughts and ideas. Jazz is a language, and once you get the grammar down, then you learn to form sentences and express yourself.

(in Enstice and Stockhouse, 2004)

The use of fake/real books and set recordings lists point to prescribing what some feel should be discovered. In using such books, the musician will always be viewed as 'faking' it - although, as in jazz, it is very uncommon for musicians to not start with such resources. There is an emphasis on playing with 'meaning' and this is likely to have greater weight in performance if one can relate this meaning to one's Jewish heritage. It is perhaps inevitable that some musicians will have fun playing with an audience's perception of heritage; Frank London has demonstrated this and it has no doubt contributed to his success.<sup>127</sup> Others, such as Alan Bern, have chosen to dedicate themselves by exploring klezmer on what they consider the deepest emotional levels. The emphasis is placed not only on the Jewishness of the music (implicit by the *Yiddish Summer Weimar*) but also on heritage. As the 'philosophy' section of his course website states:

When you learn music 'by ear' you learn not only one melody or harmony or piece, you learn a mode of perception that is perfectly matched to [the] object of music itself. For this reason, we spend a lot of time learning music directly from people, the way that much music was traditionally transmitted from person to person and *generation to generation* [my emphasis]. Traditional or 'folk' music is perfectly adapted to this process - if it weren't, people wouldn't be able to learn it

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<sup>127</sup> He won a Grammy in 2007 for the Klezmatic's album *Wonder Wheel*.

quickly and remember it. So learning ‘folk’ music by ear is one way of directly exploring the territory of music, instead of the map.

(Bern, 2011. Accessed online

<http://www.yiddishsummer.eu/116-0-Philosophy.html>

18 December 2011)

Finally, there is a marked difference on the London scene between klezmer as *function* music - or even, quite literally, music for Jewish functions, as viewed by the London Jewish community - and klezmer as promoted by the JMI. In these cases, some musicians with close associations to the community have tasked themselves with interpreting their needs, which differ markedly from what the JMI promotes. The way in which the community (in London and internationally) and the JMI have set up competitions to showcase and reward can reveal a great deal about the way the style has been set up and the way it serves the community. As I have pointed out, this may highlight a disparity, although this is difficult to prove.

In the next chapter, I look at how musicians on my scene felt it is ‘all about the music’: I will challenge that this is far from the case.

## Chapter Five

### **It's all about the music, man.**

It's a constant issue, to be honest. I've noticed, some musicians actually do their best to say 'it doesn't matter – it's all about music' and it's just music.

Field quote from a musician (non-Jewish)

In discussion with musicians, many articulated that they simply enjoy playing 'good' music. As might be expected, their reasons for finding the music appealing varied. Technical challenges, prominence of instrument in ensemble and inspiring players are some of the reasons. However, an autonomous emphasis on the music was paramount. This is perhaps an unsurprising reaction from professional musicians, who may have dedicated themselves and their professional life thus far to a mastery of their instrument rather than a style. This is also unsurprising given the discourse surrounding supposed musical autonomy in nineteenth-century Western Art Music.<sup>128</sup> What is perhaps more significant for the purposes of this study is how this is foregrounded over cultural aspects of the music and audience expectations of authenticity. There seemed to be a propensity for the music to 'speak for itself' and, whilst this is a romantic and perhaps idealistic way of looking at music, I found an initial naivety present in musicians. There is often a conflict with regard to authenticity of self when performing professionally what is perceived as someone else's music.

This chapter begins with a cursory examination of how the musicians view success. Although largely used within a commercial framework, success in music may take a number of forms. Social situation, background and pressures of 'selling out' as well as the whole gamut of 'authenticity' expectations mean that many musicians may not see success purely in commercial terms.

I subsequently examine the common backgrounds of many of the musicians in my study and suggest ways in which this has shaped the scene and the way in which we interact

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<sup>128</sup> See Tarasti (2002) for a discussion of this with reference to Taruskin. Also Chapter Six in the same book, which discusses this in relation to Chopin.

with each other within it. I explore the inevitable class issues that allow such musicians to operate and the repercussions this has with regard to performances. Many musicians from middle or upper-middle class backgrounds seek to reject associations with their backgrounds. I shy away from imposing precise class definitions (as described by Marshall, Newby, Rose and Vogler, 1989) for the musicians as this appeared to be quite subjective. However, this debate seemed to be restricted to the two-tier middle class as described by Gilbert (2010) and others. I also survey methods of disseminating World Music such as magazines and CDs and how this may affect the way in which musicians interact.

Finally, I look at how musicians have experimented with myth and played with notions of the Real Deal in a conscious way in order to be more commercially successful or perhaps simply to amuse themselves. I look at a number of issues and dilemmas encountered during the course of this study that relate to manipulating audience perception of the Real Deal, both conscious and unconscious, and highlight how there is potential for tension here.

## **Success**

Finck's 1907 book *Success in music and how it is won* endeavours to address the nature of success in music. The first part of the book captures the dilemma faced by all musicians: 'music, money and happiness'. Finck's book is over one hundred years old, yet many of his arguments ring true for the modern musician. Although the nature of success did not come up in all of my discussions, a number of musicians made reference to it and I present these sections here in full. As one Jewish musician told me:

You've got to consider what the audience might think, but if you're gonna be successful you can't pander because your success will be very short lived. Not in the arts anyway. I mean, if you're manufacturing a car, then you create something that people need. Like a Smart Car, that you can park. The need comes – and you fulfil it. With music and with art, it's a little bit more difficult because to be convincing, you've got to be... people would spot a bull-shitter a mile off. Somebody who's trying to do something for the sake of the audience and trying to

do it for the sake of popularity and success – it's just plainly obvious to everybody. It doesn't last. People don't like it.

This first quote points to the complicated distinction between music as function and as art, as a supposed object of autonomous contemplation. As demonstrated in Chapter Two and also with regard to dress in Chapter Three, there is a marked distinction between success in function music; that is, 'pandering' to the audience ('for the sake of popularity') and artistic success without 'bullshit'. That foregrounding what the audience wants at the expense of what the artist wants is viewed as 'bullshit' demonstrates how many musicians view the notion of selling out. Similarly, one musician stressed the importance of playing from 'the heart':

Because, I've, for me, getting back to what I said at the beginning - if you want to actually make it as a musician you've got to be able to communicate, OK. In any style, but particularly in the areas of jazz and folk, I think. You've got to be able to express yourself and really play what is in your heart, otherwise what's the point, you're not going to sound like you are telling a story, which is what it's about and to me at the end of the day, if you are encumbered with a sense of right and wrong, you might as well forget it really.

The implication is that true success will only be achieved if one foregrounds authenticity of self and, therefore, gives what is perceived to be a sincere performance (real-real, as Gilmore and Pine would label it). There is little mention of commercial gain here, although we can perhaps see that musicians feel that any enduring commercial success will only be possible with what could be called artistic integrity. 'Making it' is, therefore, the foregrounding of artistic integrity, which is affirmed by audiences. Financial gain is a welcome by-product but, as in the case of 'selling out', never at the expense of artistic integrity. The following quote encapsulates this:

But, as a musician, I feel that I'm not doing something to be commercially successful necessarily. I mean, I would like it if my music could be commercial but I'm not going to go the extra mile to ensure that I dress in a traditional Eastern European fashion so that people think I look authentic and therefore take my music seriously. [PT: But people do though, don't they?] What? [PT: Wear the Eastern European garb and ...] Some people do but a lot of the most successful bands they don't.

Cottrell, pointing to Nettl, highlights this conflict which arises ‘between, on the one hand, the musicians’ desire to be paid for what they do, and on the other, the feeling that they should somehow be “above the material world, and that the opportunity of making music, that gift from the supernatural, is somehow its own reward”’ (2004, p.75). I realised that all of the musicians appeared to be financially secure. I was curious to find out if this was a result of their social backgrounds and if this was likely to affect their attitudes to how they perceive the Real Deal in performance.

### **Class and the ‘concert’ situation**

The more I became established on the London klezmer scene, the more I noticed that, almost without exception, we all appeared to come from similar class backgrounds. Our parents had been suitably affluent to afford music lessons for us and also to purchase instruments. Our backgrounds were comfortable enough that we felt there was financial security in place to pursue a career in music. Ultimately, should we not be able to support ourselves financially, we would always be able to turn to the family home. With regard to this, I was interested to read Turino’s (2008) comments on class:

Within hierarchical societies, for example, people of higher-status groups and classes typically essentialize the differences between themselves and members of lower classes and emphasize signs of identity that differentiate them. In earlier centuries in Europe there were actually laws that designated what colors and clothing styles the different social classes could wear. A parallel exists in the arts. The greater institutional support for, and value placed on, elite arts as opposed to popular and so-called folk arts in our society serves a similar function of marking class distinctions. The higher value placed on elite arts – e.g., the idea that classical music is somehow superior even if the majority of people don’t listen to it – underwrites the higher value of the social groups that this art indexes.

(p.105)

Whilst the above quote may resonate true for the majority of the folk/classical dichotomy, the same cannot be said for heritage music, such as klezmer. There appears to be a growing market for the World Music ‘recital’, where the audience is guided through the music on a ‘cultural journey’ through extended introductions. One prominent proponent



of such concerts announces ‘let’s go to Bulgaria’ before performing a Bulgarian piece. The audience sits quietly and listens attentively, taking care to clap at appropriate moments, which may also involve invitations to clap along from the performers, who may relish the opportunity to clap along in an ‘odd’ time signature.

One such ensemble is Kosmos, a trio of conservatoire-trained string players (violin/viola/cello) who play with an ‘inspiring fusion of folk music traditions from around the world, sophisticated jazz glides magically into wild Gypsy fiddling, emotive Jewish music into hot-blooded Tango, and free improvisation into Arabic melody’.<sup>129</sup> One of the performers mentioned this diversity of styles that may intermingle with a classical background:

I like to know that I can play in either a Jewish klezmer-style or a Romanian style, or a Bulgarian style. I’m trying to work out the difference between them. Sometimes when I’m jamming they might get mixed up a little bit. And other times I’m adding the fact that I’m classically trained and other times I’m adding something that I think sounds nice in the moment.

Although the origin of much of their music could be considered folk, their presentation clearly fits the classical concert programme that the target audience is familiar with. The majority of the musicians interviewed are aware of their classical background and the benefits that this affords them. As one musician not from Kosmos articulated:

We are classical musicians... I mean, it’s quite a classical sound that we have sometimes... And it’s not really like, sometimes I think that people just book it because it’s like – it’s got a bit of everything... It’s quite English in some ways.

Kosmos wear colourful dresses suggestive of Eastern European traditional costume and the audience is told stories pertaining to the music, often how they came across it. The audience understands that the music has been researched by the players, rather than acquired as a result of a more organic method, such as their upbringing, and so ‘Real Deal’ credentials are low. Performers from other countries also ‘guest’ with the trio,

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<sup>129</sup> Accessed online at <http://www.kosmosensemble.com/> 4 January 2011.

perhaps adding ‘Real Deal’ appeal, although these performers are also schooled in the classical manner with a familiarity of their ‘own’ folk music.

The appeal of such concerts for audience and performers alike is obvious. With ticket prices being expensive<sup>130</sup> enough to deter the less wealthy, the income for the musicians is favourable. The seated audience gets to hear the music unimpeded at a suitable volume for them and with an interval, in which they can buy a CD and perhaps discuss the music with the band. After the concert, some in the audience may have the means to consider booking the band for another event, bringing in yet more revenue for the musicians.

The success of the World Music recital means that, for some up and coming players, playing klezmer is a secure financial career alternative to an orchestral or ‘real’ job:

At this stage, the most important thing for the young professional, and the thing which makes the greatest impact on your peers, is to be paid to play. Of course, the nature of employment is also significant. Those who are fortunate enough to be doing ‘real’ professional work, with the major orchestras or in professional shows, immediately gain increased respect: they have already made it, and have proved their ability to translate their fledgling musical skills into a money-making enterprise, the ultimate goal of the aspiring professional.

(Cottrell, 2004, p.9)

The work that She’koyokh have done with Western classical music projects, such as the Aldeburgh Young Musicians training scheme (Summer 2011) and the Aurora orchestra (Winter 2012), suggest that klezmer and other World Music styles are now being seen as ‘real’ and viable jobs.

Some musicians deny that class has any bearing on the work they do. One non-Jewish musician in particular stridently denied that an affluent background had any bearing on his professional life. When I asked what class he considered himself to come from, he replied:

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<sup>130</sup> Around £10 seems to be an average.

I don't know, we never even think about it. What am I? [PT: What do you consider yourself?] I think we're all from quite different backgrounds. I don't think you'd ever guess what background [the performer] is from or perhaps you know already, I mean, his dad [works in a bank]. I don't think it makes any difference what background you are from. I still have to work bloody hard [PT: I guess that I'm saying that the musicians who I see playing World Music, broadly in London, seem to have very similar backgrounds to myself, i.e. two working parents ...] I think you could say the same for all musicians in Britain, well a lot of musicians in Britain, especially playing orchestral instruments, have come from backgrounds, you know, if you've learnt as a kid, your parents have had to have had money to possibly pay for lessons.

In terms of the interaction of musicians, it is logical that similar social backgrounds will help form bonds and establish similar working practices. This is particularly pertinent with regard to klezmer, as many Jewish families in London are financially successful and can afford a good education for their children, which often incorporates musical performance at a high level.

### **The only musicians who can afford to be poor**

As demonstrated in the previous chapter with regard to Frank London's *Di Shekere Kapelye*, there is considerable commercial appeal in the itinerant musician; audiences clearly enjoy seeing it. This may also extend to financial deficiency as is common place in blues music. This cannot be claimed by the musicians on the klezmer scene I have studied. There is, therefore, a dilemma here: there is Real Deal appeal in being poor and needing to perform for money, yet the background of the performer may not give this impression to the audience. This imbalance may be compensated for in a number of ways, such as dress and performance practice. As one Jewish performer articulated:

A lot of the time we are playing for non-Jewish audiences so if I'm thinking of dressing up, first of all, I'd think about dressing reasonably smart, because we are performing. Sometimes I might think of dressing with a sort of 19th century or, you know, turn of the century style outfit, because it kind of goes with the music and people will enjoy that. But in terms of like, I mean, there isn't, as such, a Jewish way of dressing... I mean, there isn't really. But, often perhaps, you know, like, the same as any musicians, they wear suits for *barmitzvahs*, like any musician wears a suit.

In Chapter Three, I outlined how the use of clothing representative of gypsies, such as waistcoats and long, flowing patterned dresses, may be a factor in enhancing Real Deal credentials, particularly to a less-informed audience. This can be further extended to a broader interest in clothing that may be seen as ‘poor’, ‘retro’ or ‘scruffy’, utilising ‘bargains’ from charity shops. This can be attributed to the wider fashion trend of ‘Boho-chic’ that became popular around 2003. ‘Boho’ refers to Bohemian and many elements of the style are influenced by Eastern Europe. As Manlow details:

The ‘boho’ or ‘boho-chic’ look, which was popular from 2003 to about 2005, drew from bohemian and hippie influences often combining new and vintage pieces. Skirts were longer and flowing – tiered and peasant skirts – and clothing was embellished with beads, sequins, and trimmings.

(2009, p.53)

It is significant that Manlow mentions ‘hippie’ influences, as music festivals have become a haven for World Music performers. The music festival has its roots firmly in the 1960s, when hippie counterculture first emerged. Since the inaugural WOMAD festival in 1980, World Music has been present at the majority of the UK’s music festivals. In many cases, this will take the form of a ‘Global Local’ stage as provided by Continental Drifts, one of the largest World Music agencies in the country. Many of the bands and musicians in this study are represented by Continental Drifts; many listed under the genre or package as ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Silk Road’, a clear reference to the analogy drawn between the ancient trade routes and the hippie trail to India in the 1960s. The website describes it as:

a whirlwind tour of the Ancient Silk Road from China to Spain with bands from Eastern Europe, Chinese Theatre, Flamenco and Northern Asian Music. This is our longest running program and we are still constantly inspired to replenish the package with new artists from across the Eastern European diaspora and beyond.

(Accessed online at  
<http://www.globallocal.co.uk/packages/> 4 January 2011)

This two-pole image of the klezmer musician as an itinerant hippie on a pilgrimage, who may be repackaged as a presentable classical performer, is one that is well suited to the middle-class background of many of the performers. Whether one is a product of the other is more difficult to discern, but it certainly allows for the musicians to work together in a coherent, productive and financially beneficial manner. The reasons for this look can be seen in trends of Gypsy performers such as Taraf de Haidouks and Fanfare Ciocarlia who, inadvertently, it would seem, ‘self-orientalize’<sup>131</sup> and reap the commercial benefits:

Clothing plays a big role in the audience perception of authentic village life. For example, both Fanfare Ciocarlia and Taraf de Haidouks perform in their everyday clothing. According to their manager: ‘Fanfare never uses costumes at home in Romania for weddings or ceremonies. They just dress normally. On tour in western Europe they just kept this practice, and afterwards we saw this is what audiences like.’ His partner concurs: ‘this creates, ironically, authentic Gypsy culture, because Europeans like to see a band which can create a really good party and they came on stage in absolutely normal clothing – not like folklore ensembles.’

(Silverman, 2007, p.346)<sup>132</sup>

There is not a great deal of difference between the ‘authentic’ village wear of the above bands and the pseudo-shtetl attire described in Chapter Three. Lindholm (2008) has referred to what the journalist David Brooks calls the bohemian bourgeoisie, or ‘bobos’. Perhaps this may explain a tendency for these musicians to act in such a manner:

As Brooks has described them, the bohemian bourgeoisie combined the rebellion and creativity of bohemians with the monetary success and conservatism of the bourgeoisie. ‘This is an elite that has been raised to oppose elites. They are affluent yet opposed to materialism. They may spend their lives selling yet worry about selling out.’ (Brooks, D., 2000, p.41)

(Lindholm, 2008, p.59)

Brooks’ analysis certainly seems to explain this behaviour and appears to be coherent with how we, as musicians, tend to view the Real Deal. Brooks uses the words ‘delicate,

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<sup>131</sup> See Ong (1999, p.80) as well as in Silverman (2007, p.336).

<sup>132</sup> Silverman also points out how other Gypsy groups are ‘horried’ (p.347) with how this behaviour ‘reinforce[s] stereotypes of poor “dirty” Gypsies’ (*ibid.*).

dainty, respectable, decorous, opulent, luxurious, elegant, splendid, dignified, magnificent, and extravagant' (Brooks, 2000, p.111) to describe what these new 'bobos' are against and 'authentic, natural, warm, rustic, simple, honest, organic, comfortable, craftsmanlike, unique, sensible, sincere' as preferences. Immediately, these words suggest much of what is Fake/Real about this particular klezmer scene in London. This is not to suggest that 'charity' shop clothing is always inexpensive, as a large number of 'vintage' shops have sprung up in London selling second-hand clothing for large profit and certainly not for charity - the target audience being the 'bobos', whom Brooks describes, who are looking for clothing to fit their 'boho' image. This has been particularly difficult to document and prove because musicians do not want to be seen as fake, particularly to themselves (therefore fake/fake). This reaction from one musician was not atypical:

Well, it comes back to the same story about whether you want to be fake or not. I try to dress in a way that suits the music we are performing, but I can't pretend to be anything other than what I am, but I've just thought of a story from the early days, when we were busking in [the] market... and we looked completely hippy and possibly trampish as well and anyway we were playing music by the side of the road and people [who] were walking past really thought we were from Eastern Europe and then [one of us] even started talking in a pretend Eastern European voice announcing and people came up to us and started saying 'do you speak English?' And they bought our CD and they loved it, so I can see what your story is, but I'm... the stage I'm at now, I'm not up for doing anything that's fake.

Therein lies the dilemma: middle-class and upper middle-class musicians are continually battling with issues of authenticity of self because they don't want to feel that they are 'selling out'. In the eyes of many audiences, however, they may never appear as being the Real Deal unless they compensate, perhaps having to 'fake it' so that they remain on the Real Deal line and satisfy the audiences' expectations. Ultimately, there will always be an inner tension when playing music that cannot be claimed as their own because they will never feel real/real. This needn't stop them appearing as the Real Deal to some, but this inner tension and reluctance to 'fake it' means they may struggle to realise an audience's expectations.

The irony is that it can be expensive to dress in this ‘hippy and possibly trampish’ manner. Is it a case of attempting to fill a ‘void’ by purchasing clothing and taking part in activities that will increase an individual’s feeling of authenticity of self? One musician, who had given notions of authenticity in music a good deal of thought, had not considered class as an important factor:

I hadn’t thought about it in terms of that, the empty middle class life means if you haven’t got an exotic background or an interesting background, one way of getting it, if you can’t force your parents to have different parents and have different grandparents you can sort of create your sort of instant heritage by studying hard and somehow carrying the mantle of a much more distinguished past. I suppose so, yep. I don’t know. I hadn’t thought about that. I have people in my family who are very musical and have that heritage, you know...

With application, we can acquire an ‘instant heritage’ by dressing in a certain way that may suggest to an audience that we are more Real Deal than we actually are. Because of our backgrounds, we have the wherewithal to carefully cultivate this image. It appears we may not be fully aware that we are doing it and, in the same manner, as we might say ‘I play this music because I *just like* it’, there seems to be a propensity to say ‘I wear this because I *just like* it’. The reasons may be varied and complex, but the fact remains that the musicians interviewed often did not feel the need to justify or seek any significance in the reasons why they play World Music. Silverman (2007) has pointed to a possible void in the traditions of many Western musicians:

Western European audiences are especially receptive to the authenticity troupe in Gypsy music because they strongly feel that they have lost their own authenticity and traditions. One manager said, ‘I think there is a... desire to keep something very pure and very traditional because we lost it – most of the Western audience, Western civilization, they lost stuff like this... Music like Fanfare Ciocarlia – a huge brass band – it seems very rootsy, it hasn’t been performed in Europe before... For a world music audience, it can’t be too electric, too modern; it has to be old time, roots.’

(p.343)

As Brown and Sherry have pointed out, there is an established trend for the middle-class youth dressing in such a manner:

The retro experience of today, however, is more firmly rooted in the hippy counterculture of the late 1960s. Hippies, with their taste for old fur coats, crepe dresses, antique lace petticoats, velvet skirts, and army coats, reflected an interest in authenticity and pure natural fabrics. Naturally enough, in order to meet market demand, the late 1960s saw the proliferation of ‘alternative’ secondhand shops. These shops were opened and managed by hippies themselves, reflecting an entrepreneurial turn in the antimaterialistic counterculture, which is often overlooked in the literature on subcultures. These alternative entrepreneurs stocked their shops with leather flying jackets, 1920s flapper dresses, and the popular peasant ethnic look.

(2003, p.57)

These established trends explain why it may be possible to combine items from the above passage and still be stylistically coherent and ‘authentic’ to an audience. In recent years, the Steampunk movement (see VanderMeer and VanderMeer, 2008) has blurred these lines yet further: a top hat could accompany a peasant shirt and not look out of place.

Exhibiting ‘style’ in dress is, according to Lindholm (2008, citing Miller, 1994) ‘especially characteristic of the poor and marginalized who have “come up against the problematic of modernity with a particular jolt, having had stripped away many of the traditions and structures which would mediate this relationship elsewhere”’ (p.70). The musicians in this study are not poor, but may dress in a poor or ‘trampish’ manner in order to assert their style. These subtleties of style are likely to have a bearing if the musician or group are to be seen as the Real Deal. To give an example, I have often joked with one particular musician about how I can wear a suit like a Gypsy wedding performer might, but I don’t seem to be able to ‘pull it off’ in quite the same way. The subtleties are difficult to discern and could be studied in order to increase my Real Deal credentials with a more informed audience. However, studying ‘style’ is perhaps defeating the point in terms of authenticity of self. Lindholm (*ibid.*) points to this:

The contrast harkens back to the division between those who authenticate art by immediate recognition, and those who authenticate it by tracing its genealogy, or the difference between romantic and historical musical performance.

(p.70)



To be seen as style-conscious, particularly with regards to what should be seen as casual dress, is frowned upon by other musicians. As discussed in Chapter Three, stagewear may be a considered factor in performance. I will now demonstrate how some performance mediums require the musicians to exhibit their personal style.

### **Busking and squatting**

Many of the musicians interviewed felt that busking was an ‘honest’ manner of performing. The audience can stay if they like it, hopefully giving some money. If they don’t like it, they can walk away. This is particularly true of She’koyokh, who have reaped the benefits of busking, particularly at the Sunday Columbia Road flower market in Hackney. Performing acoustically, the band sells CDs and hands out cards and flyers for up-coming gigs.

It’s a little bit easier to look the part when you are just trying to look Eastern European, isn’t it? It’s not so far away. But the thing with She’koyokh is that when people book us, they’ve already seen us, most of the time. They are not booking us, having not ever met us, because they have seen us on the street. That’s usually how we get our gigs. And they know who we are and they know what we look like. And we are not just playing klezmer anyway. We are playing other types of Eastern music which aren’t Jewish...

Many of the passers-by are dressed in a particularly Boho-chic manner and I should imagine that, for them, we may appear not only to be the epitome of the Real Deal but will also complement their East End market experience in a positive way. This is then rewarded by giving generously to the musicians and perhaps buying a CD. The Jewish past of the East End of London has been described by Lichtenstein (2007) and many others. Although the Jewish community moved from the East End mainly to North London, the associations are still present and, for many, consuming a salt beef or smoked salmon bagel<sup>133</sup> forms part of their East End market experience. The above quote is quite correct in stating that many gigs are generated from busking, many of which are weddings. The expense of hiring an eight-piece band is considerable. When long

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<sup>133</sup> Bagels are sold very close to where She’koyokh busk.

distances are involved, the band will also require accommodation and travel expenses. It would seem that there is considerable appeal in ‘discovering’ your wedding band on the streets of East London. Conversely, many enquiries are for much lower-paid events with the assumption being that, if we are playing on the street, we must need the work.

In all boroughs in London, a license is required from the council to busk and the selling of CDs without a license to trade is also forbidden. In some areas, this is more strictly enforced than in others. It would appear that this small level of criminality may add to the appeal for musicians. However, as the standard of musicianship is so high and the dress, whilst giving the superficial allusion of being poor, is clean, it makes it unlikely that anyone would confuse the musicians for bona fide beggars.

Squatting - that is, the occupation of an empty property, often by a group of people - is regarded as a civil rather than a criminal matter in the UK and, as a result, it is often very difficult and costly to evict squatters. After twelve years of continual residence, a squatter can legally apply for ownership of the property.<sup>134</sup> Although there are a significant number of people who squat for reasons of poverty, there is also a culture of middle and upper-middle class squatting that has been evident since the 1960s. Dench (2002) outlines why this may have come about:

Public housing allocation procedures were required to become more responsive to people’s needs, and less to traditional consideration of local connection and commitment. Among the first beneficiaries of this were young (and generally middle-class or upwardly mobile) members of the new Urban left – mainly students or former students committed to social modernisation – who wanted somewhere inexpensive to live near city centres, and without having to wait for it. A culture of squatting empty premises awaiting repair or decoration grew up among this group. For most it was just a short-term strategy to ease their days as students. But the reforms prioritising citizens’ needs gave squatting a new relevance, as a way of bypassing tiresome local council-housing waiting lists to get into long-term tenures. ...The squatting movement took off strongly in East London.

(p.xvi)

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<sup>134</sup> This law was being revised in late 2012.

Over the past five years, I have played at a lot of squat parties and have been surprised how the social background of the squatters has overlapped with that of musicians I have been playing with. Whilst these gigs are not as well-paid as other work, such as weddings, they often lead to better-paid work and are seen as beneficial and fashionable places to play. It would seem logical that, if the social background of the band is the same as the audience, then this will be beneficial. Rather than providing a functional service at these events, the band is often required to fit in socially with the event. A recent example of this is the occupation of the Limelight Club on Shaftsbury Avenue by The Oubliette Group of artists. The fact that the story made the local London press, TV and radio is proof enough that performing at such venues can be advantageous to performers. In the following quote by Dan Simons, the leader of The Oubliette Group, the Eastern European influence on the venture is clear:

We are using the space to raise awareness of the Belarus Free Theatre who performed at the Young Vic recently in London to draw attention to the oppression of free speech in Belarus. We are not breaking the law. We are here purely to give emerging artists a platform. We are more than happy to vacate the property in January leaving it in a better condition than when we found it.

(in Dominiczak, 2010)

Although I did not get an opportunity to perform at that particular venue, clubs such as Passing Clouds and The New Empowering Church rely heavily on the squat party model. The Radio Gagarin night that began at the Notting Hill Arts Club in close association with klezmer pop band *Oi Va Voi* has now moved to the East End of London, either at The New Empowering Church or at Bethnal Green Working Man's Club.<sup>135</sup> Events/nights such as Balkan Beats London epitomise the Eastern European squat party promising 'Gypsy, Klezmer, Balkan, Roma, Tzigan, Russian Ska, Serbian Breakz, Kroatijan [sic] Turbo Folk' (accessed online 17 January 2011 <http://www.myspace.com/balkanbeatslondon> ). The MySpace page also has a picture of the host DJ Malaka, who conforms to the Boho chic style perfectly:

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<sup>135</sup> I have played regularly at both of these clubs over the past few years.



Figure 23 DJ Malaka from *BalkanBeats London* mySpace site

There is a direct relationship between the ‘hippie’ counter culture, Boho chic manner of dressing and attendance at festivals. They were all emergent – or, at least, rooted - in the 1960s. It is perhaps noteworthy that, for musicians in their early thirties, during the 1960s their parents would have been in their twenties. It was interesting to hear some musicians discuss the influence of their parents, possibly looking for their own heritage as a result of studying and playing the heritage music of others:

But [one of my parents] played – it’s the heritage – when you get to a certain age, 25 or something, you start to go back. Like, when you are little, you rely on your parents and when you are a teenager, you want to get rid of your parents. Then when you are 35 you come back to your parents. You start to realise what you’ve taken from them and what you like and what you don’t like and yeah, so I started to go back [home]... sort of musically, you know? [PT: You regress?] Also, maybe you get a gig at WOMAD one day.

I think it’s actually really common. I think to deny your own roots and to get into something else because your own roots are what you kind of regard as slightly boring, especially when you are young or in your teens. And you want... apart from the stuff that you don’t even see kind of thing, the kind of stuff that’s just there in you, your cultural stuff... that you – you know. [PT: Do you think that

gets more accentuated as you get a little bit older?] Yeah. It does, yeah. I think a need for identity definitely becomes more... yeah, it does, it becomes more important in you.

Whether looking to replace some kind of cultural ‘void’, as suggested above by Fanfare Ciocarlia’s manager (Silverman, 2007), or investigating the cultural roots of one’s parents, it would seem to be a common factor that binds the musicians together and helps them interact, with the possible exclusion of musicians who do not share this background. This could even appear to extend to the soup often served at rehearsals or even social meetings, which can be seen as an inexpensive type of communal food with strong associations with Eastern Europe as well as ‘soup kitchens’ for homeless people. Of course, this may be purely coincidental.

### **Meetings with those who we see as the Real Deal**

The eagerness of musicians, particularly those of British origin, to learn from those we see as the Real Deal can encourage cultural tourism, often to places that may be culturally inaccessible due to linguistic and cultural unawareness. I have had experiences with Eastern European musicians (mainly Ukrainians and Romanian Roma) that have been less positive or unfruitful. This is particularly noteworthy, as there is a disparity in the way the Roma are often revered in the UK and ostracised in Eastern Europe. Silverman (2007) points out that ‘there is an irony here as this current association of Gypsy music with authenticity is ironic considering the historic East European exclusion of Gypsy music from the category “tradition”’ (p.343). Whilst this may be down to cultural differences and generations of repression, the reasons are less important here. Certainly, as discussed in previous chapters, Gypsy-themed nights are very popular and Gypsy culture, in the broadest sense, is an integral part of the scene I am studying. The film *Latcho Drom* traces the ‘true journey’ of Gypsies from India to Spain, showing how they have been expelled from each country. There is no mention in the film of why they were forced to leave or much discussion surrounding any justification for such expulsion. Notwithstanding the persecution of such people, this rather one-sided stand-point makes

for greater entertainment no doubt, and also represents the wider empathy for Gypsies in the UK as well as on the scene on which I play. Silverman echoes these sentiments:

*Latcho Drom* is a staged documentary which traces the Romani musical diaspora from India to Spain. Stunning musical performances and stark visuals accompanied by few words evocatively show artistry and marginality, but the filmic viewpoint is of an outsider looking into a world of supposed “authenticity”. There are no naturally occurring contexts for music making (all contexts are staged especially for the film), and there is little attention to music as a profession. (in Silverman, 2007, p.339)

I was keen to hear stories of how other musicians on the scene I am studying had interacted with those musicians (or perhaps audiences, even) that we see as the Real Deal, possibly overseas. I suspected that we might be potentially vulnerable as a result of our eagerness, particularly with regard to Gypsy culture, which differs greatly from the backgrounds of many of the musicians. One musician relayed his story:

And they were trying to persuade us to kind of, to do a recording with the younger [musicians] or something. But they wanted us to pay for it, or something. Anyway... everyone was very excited about it and he said he was going to teach me and stuff. So, we were all set to come back the next day because we were all quite excited about this and we’ve sort of listened to them and it was awesome, and he started to teach me a tune and... really incredible experience really... and then we were going to come back the next day to sort of, you know, do some more music but then we got back into the car and the radio was missing. [PT Shit] So, that was a bit of a drag. [PT So, what – they had nicked it?] Well, someone... yeah. A Gypsy had nicked it, I don’t know. Strange. I remember, it’s obviously... I guess they didn’t have much of a good reputation anyway, but I remember one of them. I went to the car to get my [instrument] and – I had [both my instruments] with me – a bit risky. I went to the car to get one of my instruments out and I remember one of them was sort of like, I remember one of them sort of put his arm around me and he sort of distracted me for a second and that might of... and anyway. It’s all a bit...

The above story highlights the potential danger of travelling in Eastern Europe, particularly when a common language isn’t shared and often heavy social drinking is encouraged. As expected, musicians are keener to share positive stories and music that they had learnt. It would seem that care should be exercised in such situations. Often, it

can be a very positive experience; however, as in the following example, it can cause tensions:

And of course, we had gypsies coming up to see us and they got really upset because we were obviously Caucasian Westerners... [PT On their turf...] On their turf – calling ourselves gypsies. Now, obviously, they didn't understand the [proper meaning of our band]. So, I explained this to a couple of the guys and got chatting to them, but it was my first experience of it being a slightly tetchy issue. Something that people feel very strongly about. Especially, say, in Bosnia, where – 'cause this happened again in Bosnia – and I really had to go into depth with this guy and say 'look, we're not trying to take your music away from you or make money out of it or anything like that – we're simply, recently, us, as a band, have got really interested in it and it's simply that'. And I explained the meaning of [the band name], I said, we changed our name at that point in the tour because I couldn't handle it any more.

Although it may be an obvious conclusion, cultural and social similarities allow musicians to work together more effectively. Conversely, negative experiences with those who we see as the Real Deal, particularly 'in the field', are often overshadowed by our desire for the music to 'do the talking'.

### **The rejection of academia**

I mention 'the field' above and it is clear that musicians who have spent time in Eastern Europe studying the music use this as part of their promotion. However, their methodology is not an academic one, although musicians may make recordings and notes. It would seem that an 'academic' approach is not seen as the most appropriate if one is to be seen as a practising musician, as the musical material is usually transmitted orally. It was interesting to hear several musicians highlight this distinction between performers and ethnomusicologists. One non-Jewish musician had given this quite a lot of thought:

Authenticity and... I mean... Basically, right, you're from London. You play music from somewhere else, OK? Well, if you take the completely academic, ethnomusicological approach, you will go and study that music so accurately - you play it like that person, OK? Well, OK, I've got a huge amount of respect for

that, as I do for anybody who studies anything in depth, that's a very admirable thing to do. But I don't know necessarily whether it's admirable to perform it. You know, that's a study which has hopefully increased that person's understanding of, not just that music but... [PT: Let me just stop you there, because you've brought up an interesting point. So, you are studying a particular music and you are obviously trying to reach this pinnacle.] Right. [PT: The aim is then to play it as well as somebody from that culture might.] Yeah, that's what I would say is the, in my quotes, academic, ethnomusicological approach.

This raises the issue of whether musicians view themselves as musicians or academics, or both. It appears to be expected that an ethnomusicologist will make some attempt to learn the language of the culture they are studying, whereas a 'musician' may see the music itself as language enough. This was seen by some to be a marker of difference between an academic and ethnomusicological approach. Laušević (2007) surveyed those who learnt a Balkan language to complement their interest in the music:

Although 41 percent of the sample had not studied a Balkan language, 59 percent had devoted some effort to studying one or more of them. Bulgarian was studied by 29 percent, Serbo-Croatian by 13 percent. These figures include all levels of proficiency, so, rather than showing the percentage of people who can speak one or more Balkan languages fluently, they show the percentage of people whose interest in Balkan dance and music has led them to try to learn and understand, to some degree, the language of their choice.

(p.45)

Although Laušević's statistics are, in one way, useful, for the purposes of gaining Real Deal credentials I would suggest that fluency is required in a language. Many people make an effort to learn some stock phrases in a language before travelling, but this is likely to only have superficial benefit in communicating with people. The following quote by a monolingual musician illustrates how proficiency in a language is difficult to gauge:

They really liked it, what we did. It's like, some other cultures really like it when you learn their language, or whatever, you feel more welcomed.

After singing in Russian, I have had people come up and speak directly to me in Russian after the performance. Whilst my current proficiency in the language is conversational at



best, I rarely find that, in London, my Russian is better than the average audience member's English. On a number of occasions, this has prompted the audience member to ask 'do you understand what you are singing about?' Of course, I have taken the time to translate the lyrics, but this does raise an interesting point and certainly directly exposes me as not the Real Deal to all those listening to the conversation. I have always found it most productive to use the language in which we can most effectively communicate.

There is perhaps an element of linguistic imperialism whereby British musicians are seen to be reluctant to learn another language (see Phillipson, 1992). As English is the most widely-spoken global language, musicians often find this is the common tongue. I was interested to read Youssou N'Dour remark on this propensity for the British (some might say English) to remain monolingual:

'I'm really more close to the British vision than the French,' he said. 'France was much more involved with their colonisation, compared with how things were with the British in Ghana, for example, and in the same way they really don't have such a good approach for this music. It's definitely different.' We talked about how in colonial days their subjects had to learn French, whilst the British were content to largely leave education in the local language.

(in Anderson, 2000, p.39)

In the case of the London klezmer scene, the lingua franca of the Real Deal musicians should arguably be Yiddish, as Real Deal klezmer musicians speak Yiddish (at least, according to the JMI). The problem being that Yiddish is not a widely-spoken language. According to Ethnologue,<sup>136</sup> in 2009 there were 1,762,320 speakers of Eastern Yiddish. The number of people who speak it as a first language is much smaller. As noted in Chapter Three, subscription to Oz Azoy! is relatively low, particularly compared to KlezFest. The participation on the scene of London's Hassidic community who speak Yiddish as a first language is negligible. Consequently, it is not expected that a Jewish musician performing on the London klezmer scene would be a fluent Yiddish speaker. Such is the overlap with other Eastern European cultures and music that other languages,

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<sup>136</sup> [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_family.asp?subid=1211-16](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=1211-16) accessed online 20 December 2011.

such as Russian, Romanian and Ukrainian, are perceived just as Real Deal and irrefutable.

The debate surrounding learning a language associated with music and music *as* language are highlighted in the following discussion about two fellow monolingual musicians with another monolingual musician:

He just listens. It's two different languages. Music is a language in itself isn't it? [PT: Yeah, but in terms of understanding the music – surely you would have to talk to people about it?] No, because it's instrumental music and unless you are trying to get a band together with a vocalist and you are trying to learn the songs, then you don't need to learn the language. [PT: But music is very much a social thing as well. I'm definitely not being prescriptive about this, it's just interesting: to become something of an expert in the music of that country without speaking the language of that country.] But you say music is a social thing, well, it's not if you just sit at home and practice it in your bedroom. And yet still you can say that you play Bulgarian music. [PT: Yeah, you can.] Look at [this musician]... never, ever been to Eastern Europe and yet... plays Balkan [music] like... I would say [it] sounds pretty Serbian... [PT: *You* would say.] I would, but then Serbian guys probably wouldn't. [PT: Wouldn't they?] Well, I've met one of them – and he wasn't impressed. And it was quite funny – because he was impressed with what I was doing – and [the other musician] was standing right next to me while he was talking to me – and he said 'yeah, like I've been to Gucha, like 25 times' and he wouldn't even look at [the other musician].

Here, we see a musician asserting that knowledge of the spoken language isn't essential. However, the musician in question has travelled in Eastern Europe and clearly sees that as being important and an advantage over the musician who has not. We can also see further evidence of Real Deal power play in 'I would say [it] sounds pretty Serbian' yet a 'Serbian... probably wouldn't'.

The multiple meanings that can be placed on music are at the heart of any perceptions of the Real Deal when dealing simply with a performance. That is, when no extra interaction with the audience is involved and when the music is instrumental. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, this may be one reason why there are more vocalists who are seen as the Real Deal, as they are often singing in their native language. It would appear to be much

more difficult to ‘fake it’ in a non-native language. Erikson (2002) compares language to the perhaps equally ambivalent art form of dance:

Is a bad dancer doing his own dances more authentic than an excellent dancer from somewhere else - and not just excellent in the slick professional way – but perhaps one that grasps the fine qualities of movement – is that dancer less authentic? We could pose this question from the point of view of languages: Is a poor native speaker of English nevertheless more authentic than someone who studied English as a second language and speaks it flawlessly and eloquently?

(Erikson, 2002, p.137)

To answer this question with regard to the Real Deal is difficult, as we would need to ask ‘authentic’ for whom? We might also ask, if the English was spoken ‘flawlessly’, then how would anyone know that they were not, in fact, a native speaker? Aspects of power play may be an important factor and, as mentioned in the previous chapter, people may ‘play a card’ to assert their authority over aspects of authenticity. Once again, we find ourselves looking to those with academic credentials to validate and mediate who is actually right:

According to Cusick, when we subjugate ourselves to the pure aesthetic experience required by ‘the music itself’, we simultaneously enter into a relation of power. This is a relation set up between the ‘loss of listening self in the aesthetic experience of music’, on one hand, and ‘the power claimed by those who would interpret “the music itself” in language – musicologists and their institutional kin’ (Cusick, 1999, p.494), on the other: ‘For they do not lose themselves; they interpret for us the nature of the thing in which we lose ourselves...’ (Cusick, 1999, p.494).

(Pontara, 2007, p.79)

I share Pontara’s view in that, whilst Cusick makes an important point, ‘she is heading towards the highly questionable conclusion that musicologists and “their kin” in a more or less calculating way use the language of “the music itself” in order to gain control over the music and the lay listener’ (*ibid.*). Whilst this may not be calculated, the perhaps inevitable interest in klezmer by scholars who self-identify as Jewish is bound to have an impact on how non-Jews view authoritative sources.

Aside from the motivations of ethnomusicologists who self-identify as Jewish in order to study klezmer,<sup>137</sup> ethnomusicology is not seen as a creative process. Whether attainable or not, impartiality is attempted and publications are often rigorously peer-assessed. Commercial musicians, such as those contained within this study, may see this ethnomusicological approach as impeding their creativity and, possibly, their integrity as an artist. As one non-Jewish musician articulated:

But I'm not, for a minute, going to try and kid people that I am the authentic, the 'real deal' to take your quote. What I'll do, sorry to go on a tangent here, but what I do is, I've got a real respect for the tradition and I'll try and get as much of the detail as I can in certain circumstances, but then I'm really proud to bring my own style to it and see what happens.

This dichotomy may be clearly seen in the difference between the academic press and the popular magazines that are dedicated to World Music in the UK, notably *fRoots* and *Songlines*. Creativity is lauded together with cross-cultural collaboration and, unsurprisingly, Continental Drifts artists are often featured in such magazines. I am keen to examine how musicians might be creative in presenting projections of the Real Deal in order to appeal to audiences.

### **Re-inventing the Real Deal: Willie Bergman**

More super cool jewish [sic] music in London.  
Bush Hall hosts the 'Yiddish Twist Orchestra'  
December 4, 2008.

For one night only be transported back to 1945, as the all-star Yiddish Twist Orchestra grace the stage of Bush Hall. Throw on your glad rags and don't forget your dance-cards for this astonishing evening of rumba, twist and rationed doughnuts in a glorious, crumbling Edwardian dance hall.

(Accessed online  
[http://www.jcclondon.org.uk/Nightlife\\_8\\_Nights.html](http://www.jcclondon.org.uk/Nightlife_8_Nights.html)  
1 February 2011)

Commissioned by the Jewish Community Centre (JCC), the Yiddish Twist Orchestra is a seven-piece band recreating the music of the fictitious Jewish band leader, Willie

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<sup>137</sup> Joshua Horowitz and his group Budowitz are an example of this in the USA.

Bergman (1917-1969). Willie (or Willy) Bergman is the invention of Rohan Kriwaczek, whose mock-article documents his chance encounter with Willie's supposed son, Walter Bergman. Written from his mock position as 'senior lecturer in Conceptual Ethnomusicology, University of Bexhill-on-Sea', we learn about the 'Yiddish Twist' that Bergman supposedly made popular. In line with Kriwaczek's other publications, such as *An Incomplete History of the Funerary Violin* (2006), the work is a carefully researched work of fiction. In the Bergman story, Kriwaczek mentions that 'the Willie Bergman Yiddish Twist Orchestras (there are currently two) are both on successful tours'. In 2008, the trumpeter and musical impresario Jonathan Walton aka Lemez Lovas, in collaboration with the JCC, decided to make the Yiddish Twist Orchestra a reality.

The 'real' musical basis is a 1963 recording by the enigmatic Solomon M Schwartz that was reissued in 2004 by the Russian label Solnze. Kriwaczek admits that he is unable to find any biographical information about Solomon M Schwartz, and neither can I. These many layers of myth certainly add to the intrigue and create a layer of possible – or, at least, potential - truth to the Bergman story.

Consequently, in late 2008 a band of klezmer luminaries was assembled to recreate this music on stage, with the Bergman myth at the heart of the performance. It was particularly interesting to see how we could create a band that played on the audience's Real Deal expectations, yet was based on a work of fiction. The 'Jewish' element to the music was the fact that Bergman (himself, of course, Jewish) had chosen to blend songs largely from Yiddish Theatre, such as *Yossel Yossel* [aka Joseph Joseph] and *Shein vi di L'vone* [*lit* beautiful like the moon], with Dick Dale-style twist beats and 'surf' guitar sounds. Due to the involvement of the JCC, the publicity was naturally targeted at the local Jewish population largely through the Jewish press.

The overall theme of the night was set at the end of the Second World War, which curiously pre-dates the music somewhat. The audience was encouraged to dress up accordingly and some of the musicians played Wartime classics in the foyer. The reasoning for this 1945 theme was unclear: perhaps it was to highlight the perseverance of Jewish elements in culture post-holocaust. The musicians in the band had accessorised

formal suits with Jewish elements, seemingly for comedic effect. Polina Shepherd was dressed, *Yentl* style, as a Hassidic man:



Figure 24 *Polina Shepherd performing with the Yiddish Twist Orchestra*

Throughout the performance, Walton/Lovas introduced various layers of myth about Willie Bergman to the audience. There was even a painting, purportedly by Bergman, that was due to be auctioned off if time had permitted. Whilst this could all be dismissed as simply good fun for both the band and audience, it was the layering of myth within the band that was particularly interesting. Several of the musicians seemed to be unclear about whether Willie Bergman actually existed or not. The following quote reveals one such story:

It helps, and it's all show biz... It helps to run on and be a little bit larger than life or, it helps. That's why you change your clothes when you go on stage, you put your stage clothes on to help you define the moment. [PT: I thoroughly enjoyed – it's probably my favourite Yiddish Twist Orchestra moment, when we did that Bush Hall gig and you said that story about when you met Willy Bergman] Yes, that's right. [PT And [that musician], I still don't think [the musician] knows.] Yes ... [PT ... hasn't got a clue – [still] thinks Willy Bergman is a real person ...] Well, he is. [PT Obviously.] Whether he existed or not. [PT Exactly, but the look on [the musician's] face when you were telling this story was just priceless.] You know, because [the musician] really thought about it. Afterwards [the musician] said 'but if that was 1962, how old were you?' and I had to say I was a very early

developer, very young guy. Willie Bergman said to me ‘Oi, you yingele, put that bagel down and fuck off’.

Musicians enact the myth of Willie Bergman with each other, seemingly for fun. This exploits audience perceptions of the Real Deal, whereby a believable fictitious past is used by performers not only as a selling point, but also to assert a cultural link. Kriwaczek mentions in the story that ‘it is as if he has become a kind of Jewish Everyman’. In many ways, the Willie Bergman story has elements of the Robert Zemeckis film *Forest Gump* (1994). Willie seems to have achieved a remarkable amount in his life, embodying the lives of many immigrant London Jews: his scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music, his involvement as a soldier during World War Two, involvement with the Musicians’ Union, and his eighteen-month stay at an Israeli Kibbutz. To quote the story:

As I entered the magnificent main hall it all came flooding back to me; how my grandparents had taken me to synagogue every Friday and Saturday, the blessings over the candles and food at dinnertime, the old Yiddish tunes my grandpa would play on his wheezy accordion; all of it. And suddenly I realised it was not that I was Jewish; it was that I was a Jew... it came down to an issue of identity, ethnicity.

(Kriwaczek, 2009)

By delivering familiar Yiddish show tunes within the currently popular genre of Twist, the audience may also be encouraged to embrace their own Jewishness. I was keen to discuss with musicians why we feel the need to invent such myths. One Jewish musician, who has played in the Yiddish Twist Orchestra, elaborated:

I mean, fiction is only fiction if you believe it as such. If you’re presented with a set of information, with a set of facts whether they are fictitious or, in inverted commas, ‘real’ (I think – in this instance that ‘real’ should be written without inverted commas – as it is written out), what does it matter? Why create a story when, first of all there are so many old ones that are pretty amazing and secondly, whatever we are presented with in the media, is fiction anyway, as soon as it’s gone through one transference of information, it becomes non-factual. I don’t care whether Madonna’s hands now look like a 60-year-old’s hands. I don’t care if some celebrity did this, that or the other. I don’t care whether Naftule Brandwein was a shikker and he drank all the time. It doesn’t affect me. What I listen to, is

his music... Live like Belf, play like Belf. I don't know. I mean, it doesn't actually bother me. In a way, the stories aren't relevant. Because, there are six and a half billion stories and... the story doesn't interest me. The music interests me. [PT... I'm kind of interested to know whether musicians think the audience give a shit. Do they like things like that?] The audience love the story. The audience need the story. The audience need to see this band of dark skinned, wild, fiery violinists from.... They need to see a band that's from... the Tarrif de Haidouks have been going since before my great-great-great-great grandfather was born: bullshit, they were put together by a record company. They're just musicians from one particular little town in Romania.

Once again, this relays how musicians, particularly Jewish, are much more interested in the autonomy of the music, by stressing that they are 'just musicians'. There is certainly an acknowledgment that the music industry uses stories, including those relating to heritage, to sell the product. It seems surprising, however, that musicians show ambivalence to this, despite often casually playing on such features. Some of the situations I had encountered as a non-Jew were, when relayed to Jewish musicians, dismissed outright. I often presented them as hypothetical to avoid personal association, although all stories were factual:

No, but genuinely – I'm surprised that in your experience, people – this hypothetical audience, give a shit. And I don't think, in their comments, like 'you play as if you were Jewish, you must be Jewish' – that shows that they do give a shit. I don't think that it does.

Bohlman's (2008) chapter on 'Inventing Jewish Music' draws from the conclusions from *The Invention of Ethnicity* (Soller, 1989). Bohlman feels that 'basic forms of identity and community-building may have less to do with reality than with the construction of reality' (2008, p.78). Concurring with my earlier argument, Bohlman asserts that any notion of inventing Jewish music must 'embrace the creative activities of the artist' (*ibid.*, p.79).

To conclude, it would seem that there are artistic, financial and possibly even social benefits for musicians 'inventing' culture. Whilst musicians may not spend time considering the possible wider cultural implications, the music industry is accustomed to alter-egos and stage names and so it has become an accepted norm. This raises the



possibility that, if a myth is perpetuated enough, the audience and perhaps even the musicians may feel that they are getting the Real Deal. I was surprised that one musician even commented that I am like a ‘modern day Willie Bergman’, as a result of my name change and my dabbling in many styles of music. I hadn’t considered this; but, upon reflection, I can see why. Not only has this not been by accident, but I feel my career has benefitted as a result. Am I, by teaching at KlezFest, encouraging others to subscribe to music that is built on ‘legend’ and does it even matter if this is entirely based on fact? Could this be applied to all teaching, where a certain trust is placed in the teacher to impart knowledge that is ‘true’ and ‘sincere’? This raises a pertinent dilemma for any teacher, particularly one who may not be seen as the Real Deal.

### **What’s in a name? Turning the gun on myself**

Due to the nature of my research, sometimes it has been difficult to maintain a neutral position within some bands. An example of this is with She’koyokh. First, I found myself replacing Jim Marcovitch in the band after his death in late 2008. This placed me in a curious position because Marcovitch was one of the musicians whom I interviewed. Despite not being halachically Jewish,<sup>138</sup> Marcovitch was not only a major creative force in the band, pushing the kind of klezmer the JMI promotes, but also a strong Jewish presence both physically and as a performer.

Several members of the band have also developed an interest in Balkan and Turkish music styles and this has formed a dominant part of Shekoykh’s core repertoire, causing the group to deviate from its beginnings as a klezmer band. Although the band began as a JMI project, this shift meant that the band was a less useful commodity for the JMI agenda. I found myself in a position of trying to redress this imbalance, which would ultimately yield more engagements for the band. As well as contributing accordion, I also began to sing some Yiddish and Jewish Russian songs, which instantly raised the Jewish profile and saleability of the band. The fact remained, however, that only one member of the band self-identified as Jewish.

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<sup>138</sup> Only his father was Jewish.

This proved to be an identity problem in that the band were known to many as She’koyokh Klezmer Ensemble, yet much of the music the band played did not fit the JMI vision of klezmer, nor that of the wider Jewish community. This was leading to problems when audiences came expecting what they saw as ‘Jewish’ music and heard what they identified as Turkish and Balkan music, even if there were Jewish connections to the music. The band was keen to be known simply as She’koyokh, dropping the Klezmer Ensemble. However, I felt that the use of a Yiddish word might suggest a klezmer band to many.

At a meeting in late 2010, we discussed possible ways to rebrand the band. At this point, the band was already offering two packages, one whole band with a wide range of styles and one smaller quartet focusing on Jewish music styles. As a result of my research and wider reading, the obvious thing seemed to be to rebrand the band with a new name. The evidence that I could cite in favour was significant and many in the band were receptive and approving of this. However, it would be difficult to sideline ten years of work and development and the name change idea was dropped. Since moving to London, I had not revealed my previous name to any of the members of She’koyokh and this had become something of a point of curiosity for certain members of the group. At this meeting, it was suggested that, if I was serious about the band name change, then I should reveal my, as they saw it, ‘real’ name. If the band members were to be true to themselves and admit that their heritage was not Jewish, then I should be true to myself and reveal my original surname.

## **Conclusion**

Having to reveal my own birth name would seem a fitting end to research that was initiated by people’s interest in my new surname. Ultimately, in working closely with musicians, it is inevitable that such a marker of my authenticity of self be revealed in order that the other band members feel I am being sincere with them.

As musicians strive for greater success, be it commercial or some other marker, the way in which we question our approach to the profession changes. Although I didn't consider age when I started the research, it now seems that this may be a factor, as greater financial pressures may be placed upon us as our non-musician peers' careers progress. Perhaps our initial reaction is to revert to what many of our backgrounds have suggested, that the 'concert' situation is not only a secure way to make money, but will afford us respect from the audience. However, this would seem to conflict with our apparent desire for rebellion and a youthful rejection of our often staid upbringings. The music that has captured our imaginations also carries with it associations of a much more exciting and 'exotic' past.

We may strive to imitate not only the music, but recapture elements of the image that those musicians we 'idolise' may project. In the multicultural hub that is London, that may be acceptable. However, when we venture out and make contact with such musicians, it may not be quite as we had expected. This may happen on a number of micro levels and continue to happen as we are exposed to new situations and new musicians.

As musicians, we seem to be eager to 'keep it real' and this would seem to distance many professional musicians from academia. This can sometimes lead to interesting interpretations of the music of other cultures. Without an ethnomusicological approach, the music is often played without a full understanding of the cultural context. As I have found personally, such study takes a good deal of time that might otherwise be spent practising one's instrument. However, there are creative benefits of adopting a more music-centric approach that foregoes some of the cultural context that may not be required. As in the case of many of the musicians on this scene, they are also interested in exploring a wide range of different music from often diverse cultures.

As I have shown with the Yiddish Twist Orchestra, it can be interesting when musicians start to play with notions of who is the Real Deal and start to re-invent themselves. Whether audiences fully subscribe to this is often difficult to tell. However, it is clear that

some musicians enjoy doing this and it would appear that this enthusiasm is transmitted to the audience.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusions

To restate my thesis, I wished to formalise discussions with musicians in order to discern to what extent issues of perceived authenticity affect the way we work. I referred to aspects of authenticity particular to the type of work that we do as the Real Deal, which reflects common usage. The Real Deal graph proved to be a useful starting point and prompted musicians to reflect on authenticity and how this informed the way we present ourselves. This gave rise to several terms such as *jewdar* and *olmaz* that embody the way that musicians think about the Real Deal.

It is clear that issues surrounding authenticity are encountered by musicians regularly on the London klezmer scene. Not only does this affect working practices, but it also has wider personal and social significances. The adoption of klezmer as a uniquely Jewish music in London demonstrated much to me about the Jewish community here. Many showed total ambivalence towards klezmer, seeing it as representing the ‘old world’ and looking instead towards Israeli. Others viewed it as a countercultural movement and a way of embracing their cultural roots.

Through my extensive interviews, I was able to not only dedicate time to hearing and recording the views of my colleagues and friends, but I was able to reflect on my own attitudes towards playing klezmer. It became clear quite early on that those who identified as Jewish did not dwell on the fact that they were Jewish and played what is seen as Jewish music. Conversely, those who identified as not Jewish appeared to have questioned it a great deal, and this research is perhaps the most significant testament to that. One ‘result’ is, hopefully, that the Jewish musicians have given it a little more consideration and the non-Jewish musicians feel a little more at ease.

The more I learnt about klezmer and Jewish music in general, the more my own position changed. As perceptions of authenticity shift in relation to one's vantage point and

perception, this problematises any study by heightening subjectivity. It is for this reason that klezmer, as an ambiguous Jewish music style, is well-placed to highlight this complexity. Institutions with a varied cultural portfolio such as the JMI and those who control the World Music markets encourage the Real Deal to be seen as a desirable commodity, and this clearly has repercussions for musicians. It became evident that discussing and highlighting these issues with musicians is important. As my research advanced, the way musicians adjusted their working practices demonstrated this to me. The language of commerce borrowed from Gilbert and Pine was initially received by the musicians I interviewed as foreign and incongruous to their field and their perceptions of their own work within it. However, as they became more aware of the importance of the Real Deal, I noted a process of de-romanticising. As all of the musicians grew older with the project, this may have been incidental, but I suspect not.

The nature of this type of research means that ‘the field’ changed considerably over the course of study. Some of the bands are no longer performing and some have gone on to enjoy differing degrees of commercial success. The complex interpersonal relationships that combine with professional work have been a particular challenge, not least when asking often quite personal questions. However, it has been these close relationships that ultimately have allowed me to carry out such work. I feel that the musicians have spoken frankly with me. Sadly, one of the musicians I interviewed died and, partly as a result of my interest in this area of music, I found myself replacing him in the band. This has been both a personal and professional challenge, not only musically but also in the application of my findings.

Having heard musicians use the term, I already knew that the Real Deal existed as a concept. It was more of a challenge to find a workable and viable definition that would encompass how musicians used the term. Although not scientific, the Real Deal graph based on similar ideas by Gilmore and Pine (2007) proved useful, not only as a means of initiating discussions with musicians but also as a way of situating different types of ‘gig’. It is beneficial for musicians to be able to plot their performances on such a graph, even if it is a conceptual one. It allows them to reflect on the way an audience and other

musicians might react to them. It also encourages them to challenge or even concur with existing stereotypes.

As my research progressed, it was interesting to see how Gilmore and Pine's prescriptive approach to authenticity was appreciated and adopted by musicians as part of their working practices. For example, would they wear different clothing if it prompted the audience to think they were more authentic, even if this was contrary to initial inclinations, or even went against what they believed? The evidence from the business world, as demonstrated not only in a number of texts such as Boyle (2003) and Lewis and Bridger (2001), but also as part of everyday life, seemed to suggest that musicians *should* draw certain conclusions about choices they make. Seemingly, musicians would be more commercially successful if they were perceived to be the Real Deal by audiences. Superficially, it seemed simple; yet, the reasons musicians do not always adopt these proposals, or are wary of being seen as the Real Deal if they are not, or perhaps even if they are, are complex and formed the larger part of this study.

Problems arise when a musician attempting to manifest a sense of the Real Deal encounters someone (another musician or audience member) who feels that an illegitimate claim to authenticity has been made. It seems that this does happen on occasions, although often inadvertently, as musicians are aware of this potential. These encounters can unfold in a number of ways. If the musician who is endeavouring to be the Real Deal sincerely believes that he/she *is* the Real Deal, then these claims may need to be evidenced and justified. Irrefutable claims such as heritage or birthplace seem to carry more weight than acquired skills. As I have discussed with reference to being Jewish, even heritage can be contentious. However, it has been particularly useful to refer to klezmer broadly as a 'heritage' music in this respect and I am indebted to Slobin (2000a) for highlighting this aspect of the style. Sometimes, these deliberations about authenticity may seem unfair, such as in the example of my Yiddish singing, which was deemed by one audience member as 'too German' despite the fact that, for the song in question, historically this was more accurate. It did not fit his perception of how Yiddish singing should sound and probably did sound if his parents originated from Poland.

In business, stereotypes are carefully managed and understood in order that audiences feel they are getting something 'authentic'. Although Gilmore and Pine (2007) hardly use the word stereotype, perhaps due to the stigma surrounding it, much of what they discuss is how to handle stereotyping. The musicians I interviewed, although aware of the many stereotypes that exist around the music we play, were largely against stereotyping. It would seem that the existence of stereotypes is not only inevitable, but also serves a particular purpose, especially when people perform in the bottom left of the Real Deal graph. They help an uninformed audience relate to something. Whilst the musicians on this scene shy away from stereotypes, an understanding of them is an important part of our jobs as musicians.

In music, the notion of 'selling out' (possibly by conforming to stereotypes) is derided. Artistic integrity, that is keeping a perceived authenticity of self, is to be maintained at the expense of commercial forces and pressures. This is rewarded and encouraged by audiences, somewhat ironically, with greater revenue. This is another reason why the musicians with whom I spoke were reticent about inadvertently presenting themselves as something that they felt they are not. The lack of sincerity that would result is likely to lower the standard of the performance. One consequence of this is that musicians who wish to play styles of music that audiences do not associate them with are likely to be less successful commercially than those who can make these claims. Musicians' aspirations about success vary greatly and, in many cases, we did not discuss how they view success. When this subject was raised it was often in commercial terms, although it was often hoped that this could be achieved without 'selling out'.

It is perhaps an obvious assumption to make that those musicians performing music that they believe in, that is in a sincere manner coherent with their authenticity of self, will gain the most personal satisfaction from their performance. This is a chicken and egg scenario, as the very reason the musician is likely to be performing the music is presumably because they enjoy it. This raises a number of more general questions about the performance of music. Should one feign enjoyment simply for the benefit of the



audiences, particularly if being paid enough? It would appear that the ‘professional’ would answer ‘yes’. This leads on to further questions about what constitutes professionalism in a musician and would be interesting to explore further.

As I have been analysing musicians’ perceptions of what they feel the audience want (not quantifying what they *actually* want), an expected question from all musicians was:

I think that it's an interesting question, but are you interviewing audiences to find out what they think?

It has become apparent during this study is that the way we, as musicians, behave is significantly affected by what we think the audience wants from our performances. It seems that all the musicians interviewed felt that audiences are keen to see what they perceive to be the Real Deal. I outlined what I broadly feel this might be for three different bands in Chapter Two. Each band could sit on the Real Deal line and be suited for a certain type of audience, for whom they will hopefully appear to be the Real Deal. What this study does not quantify is what audiences actually want. Certainly, this information would be very useful for musicians. However, as asserted in the introduction, I feel that a study of audience perceptions regarding the Real Deal is outside the scope of this study. It is an area that would undoubtedly further enrich and possibly validate parts of this research. More research is certainly needed and it would also be a valuable tool for musicians to further develop the way that they present themselves and, no doubt, interact. So large is the scope of a study of audience perception that any attention given to it in this study would be of limited use, at best. However, my findings here hopefully do much to demonstrate how musicians perceive what audiences may want. Any data collected about what audience members say they want is likely to be of interest to musicians. We may find out that we are all very misguided.

The commercial appeal of cross-cultural collaborative projects has been well proven, and these often serve to make any Real Deal observations seem more polarised. Although such projects may promote musicians sharing a common ‘language’ of music, it is ironic that their differences may also heighten the consumer appeal for Real Deal. The oft

discussed Paul Simon *Graceland* album required ‘real’ South African musicians. By this, I mean that it was oppressed black musicians who were a focal point. As Taylor (1997) has commented about Simon:

As a person he was resolutely anti-apartheid, as an artist, his western, voracious aesthetic allowed him to appropriate anything and do anything with it. (p.22)

However, the music became politically significant and, as a result, commercially more appealing, from the fact that he used Real Deal musicians. Put another way, the same music performed by non-South African musicians would not have had the same commercial impact and success. Are Western musicians restricted to being facilitators of collaborative projects that are intended to be marketed to a Western audience?

Klezmer, as a style of music constructed from American Jewish interpretations of Eastern European music, is an interesting example. It allows musicians a much more level playing field with regard to who the Real Deal is; the Jewish genetic pool is wide and almost anybody *could* look Jewish. Promoted as a ‘Jewish’ music style, klezmer allows Jewish musicians to explore their ‘roots’ and potentially capitalise on this as a Real Deal credential. The multifacetedness and breadth of Judaism means that practically anybody *could* be seen as being the Real Deal; however, as shown in Chapter Three, stereotypes mean that invariably some musicians will have more success than others, Jewish or not. Klezmer in Germany demonstrates how any musician can lay a claim on the style and I have found that musicians in London experience similar feelings to those articulated in Eckstaedt (2003).

Can we, as musicians, tell who is who? Do we have our own types of jewdar, which may extend to any number of ‘dars’ related to any number of heritages, musical styles and geographical areas such as *Balkandar* or *Blackdar*?<sup>139</sup> As I have pointed out, there is a close relationship between jewdar and the Real Deal *x/y* graph. Both employ, but are also reliant on, stereotypes to function. Those in the bottom left of the graph may rely on the

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<sup>139</sup> A term that has entered into American slang.

broadest of stereotypes, whereas those in the top right will be looking for the most subtle of behavioural markers. Both the Real Deal and Jewdar rely on variable perceptions based on expectations and are important factors in the way musicians work.

My discussion about dress and even make-up, such as prosthetic noses, seems to suggest that these are seen by my colleagues as concerns for actors and not for musicians. However, it would appear that we as musicians dismiss these aspects with undue consideration. Both acting and music are, of course, performing arts and these aspects of presentation are shared in both art forms. There is an expectation that, for musicians to be truly the Real Deal, they really ‘feel’ the music that they are playing and perform with sincerity. This is perhaps akin to the Stanislavskian style of method acting where actors are required to utilise ‘real’ emotion in their portrayals. I wonder if musicians might benefit from a more Brechtian approach, where we represent aspects of the culture that are recognisable to the audience, through musical style and stage presentation, yet retain an emotional distance. The sincerity would, therefore, come more from the meaning and intent rather than from a deeper, emotional connection.

This study has shown that, perhaps as a result of increasing desensitisation to any supposed ‘racial’ and ‘ethnic’ differences, musicians do not consider the way a musician looks will make a difference to the way the audience will respond to them with regard to their ability to play music. Clearly, musicians do not feel that Jewish musicians can play any better than non-Jewish musicians. However, as some music is still grouped by its geographic origins, this encourages audiences to have expectations of the ‘ethnic’ origins of musicians who might play it. This has clearly been used as a marketing tool in World Music. Musicians, however, still often seem to foreground musical features over cultural context. This promotes the view that musicians see music rather quixotically as a ‘universal’ language. This also goes some way to explain why musicians often do not see the need to learn a language associated with a particular culture; the music is seen to be enough.

Ethnomusicologists, as accredited experts in the field, are often called upon to validate authenticity. Through peer-assessed published fieldwork, musicians can read about what the Real Deal is like *in situ*. The Real Deal can equally apply to ethnomusicologists. Based on my research with this relatively small group of musicians, it is likely that musicians will show a bias towards what we see as Real Deal ethnomusicologists. There is much in common with the somewhat staid insider/outsider dichotomy, where an ‘insider’ ethnomusicologist is likely to feel much more polarised when away from home. Consequently, there are fewer people to question his/her Real Deal credentials. In fact, as an ethnomusicologist, they may become the *maven*, who people turn to in order to validate a whether something or someone is the Real Deal or not. .

This desire for authenticity that Gilmore and Pine (2007) describe extends into academia as well. The ‘outsider’ ethnomusicologist working in London has to work even harder to ensure he or she is the one people are likely to refer to as the capital’s universities enrol more and more foreign ethnomusicologists who come to study their own culture. The recent developments that require UK residents<sup>140</sup> to pay for university education, combined with funding cuts, mean that foreign students are an attractive prospect for universities. With much higher fees, the social background of foreign students is often not a fair representation of the music they may be seen to represent. As an example, it is unlikely that a student who can afford to pay for an ethnomusicology course in London, to study village folk music from their country of origin, will necessarily have experience of living in such villages. However, in London they are likely to be seen as Real Deal and, by the nature of their upbringing, enjoy a certain authority.

Although the reasons why the musicians in this study play klezmer and associated styles are varied, it has certainly led me to question why I have an interest in a musical style with which I have little personal connection and to which I certainly cannot make any claims of heritage. If authenticity of self is so important, then it follows that I can never be fully or, perhaps, truly ‘successful’. However, sincere I am about my own inauthenticity, is it likely that I am on one level deceiving myself? Perhaps it is my own,

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<sup>140</sup> Except residents of Scotland.

rather middle-class background, which has privileged me not only to play the musical styles I do, but to make my living from it? Or perhaps it is individual circumstance? I am certainly challenged musically, intellectually as well as linguistically and even culturally in playing such music. It is evident that the musicians who took part in this study share these interests.

Although the music is the focal point, it seems that we often lose sight of the extra musical factors that contribute to the appeal of the music. Audiences need no further justification than simply ‘liking’ the music. Although citing formal qualifications is of little use on the stage, I speculate that Real Deal credentials, which may also be viewed as qualifications, may hold a greater value. We as *professional* musicians perhaps need to consider our audience more as customers and the music we offer them more as a commodity, all the while never giving the impression of this. As musical taste holds very personal resonances and is highly subjective, seeing music in such commercial terms can be difficult for musicians, particularly when it calls into question their religion, physical appearance and social background. My close working and personal relationships with all the musicians in this study have hopefully allowed us to collectively reflect on this.

My personal circumstances since moving to London have revealed to me, in a very unique way, the manner with which musicians perceive the Real Deal and how this affects the way we work. I see many of my findings to be, as some musicians have remarked, ‘nothing new’. However, the lack of published material on this aspect of professional music-making prompted the research and I have already found it to have a bearing on the work I do. For those critics who may feel that I have undertaken this research too close to ‘my own back garden’, it is hoped that my frankness and rigour dispel these concerns. Through these open discussions, my colleagues have already started to give more consideration to this important topic. My hope is that this can be further disseminated.

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